Hollywood's hidden history

FROM THE MAKERS OF ALL ABOUT HISTORY

Secrets & Scandals

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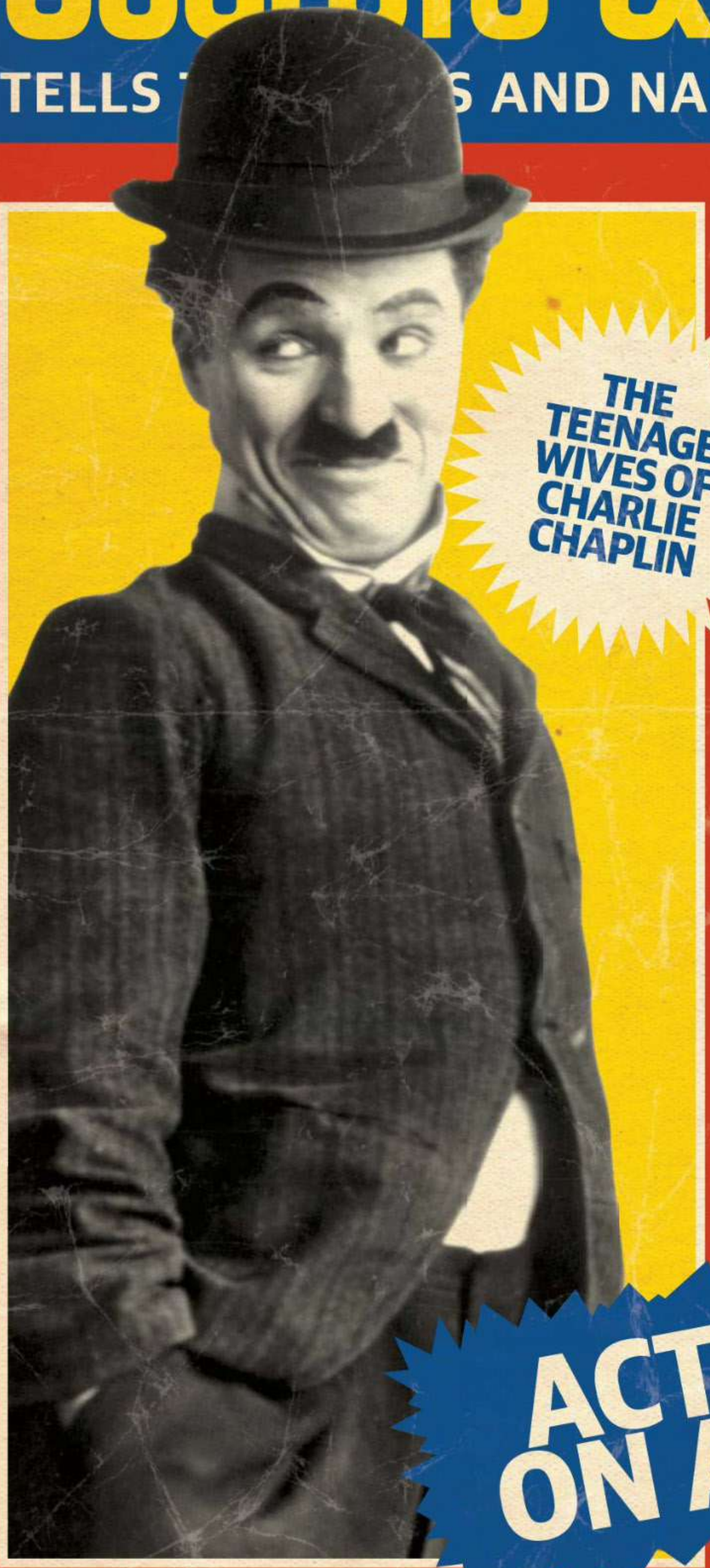

THE TEENAGE WIVES OF CHARLIE CHAPLIN

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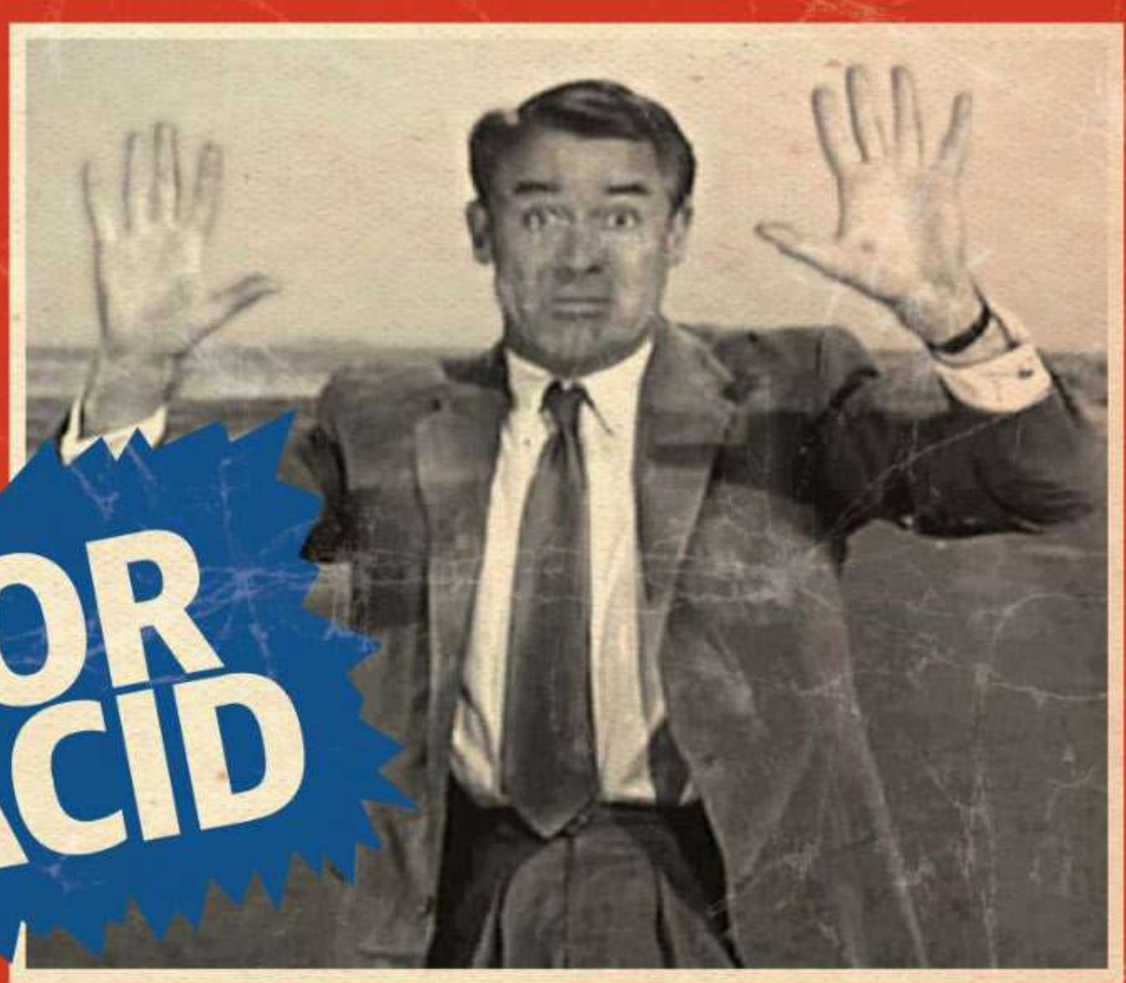

ACTOR ON ACID

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The stars of Hollywood's golden age are famed for their good looks and timeless performances, but it was often what they did off-screen that catapulted them into the headlines. In this issue, we lift the curtain on some of history's biggest superstars, revealing the scandals hidden behind...

Alicea Francis Deputy Editor

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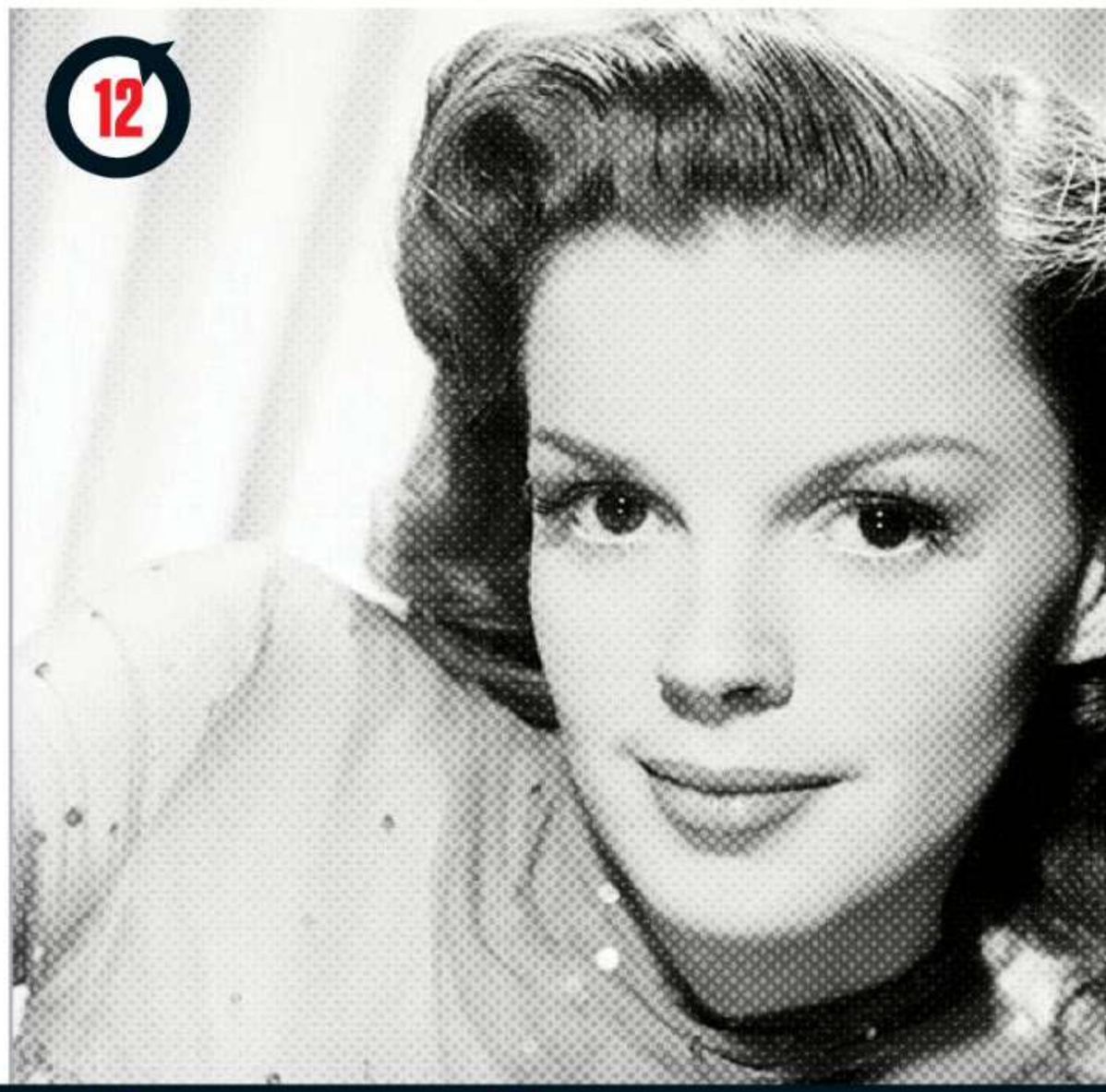
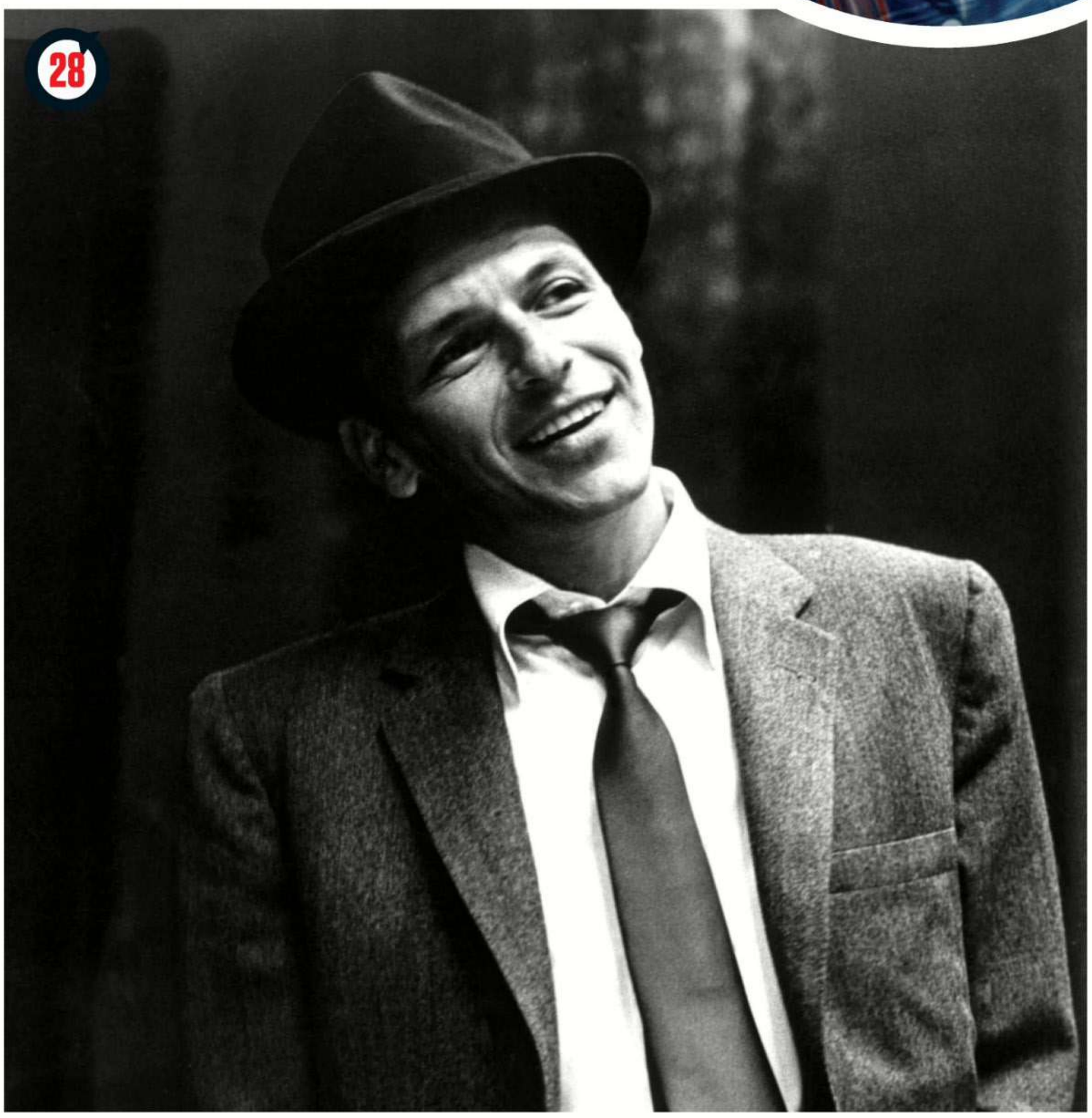
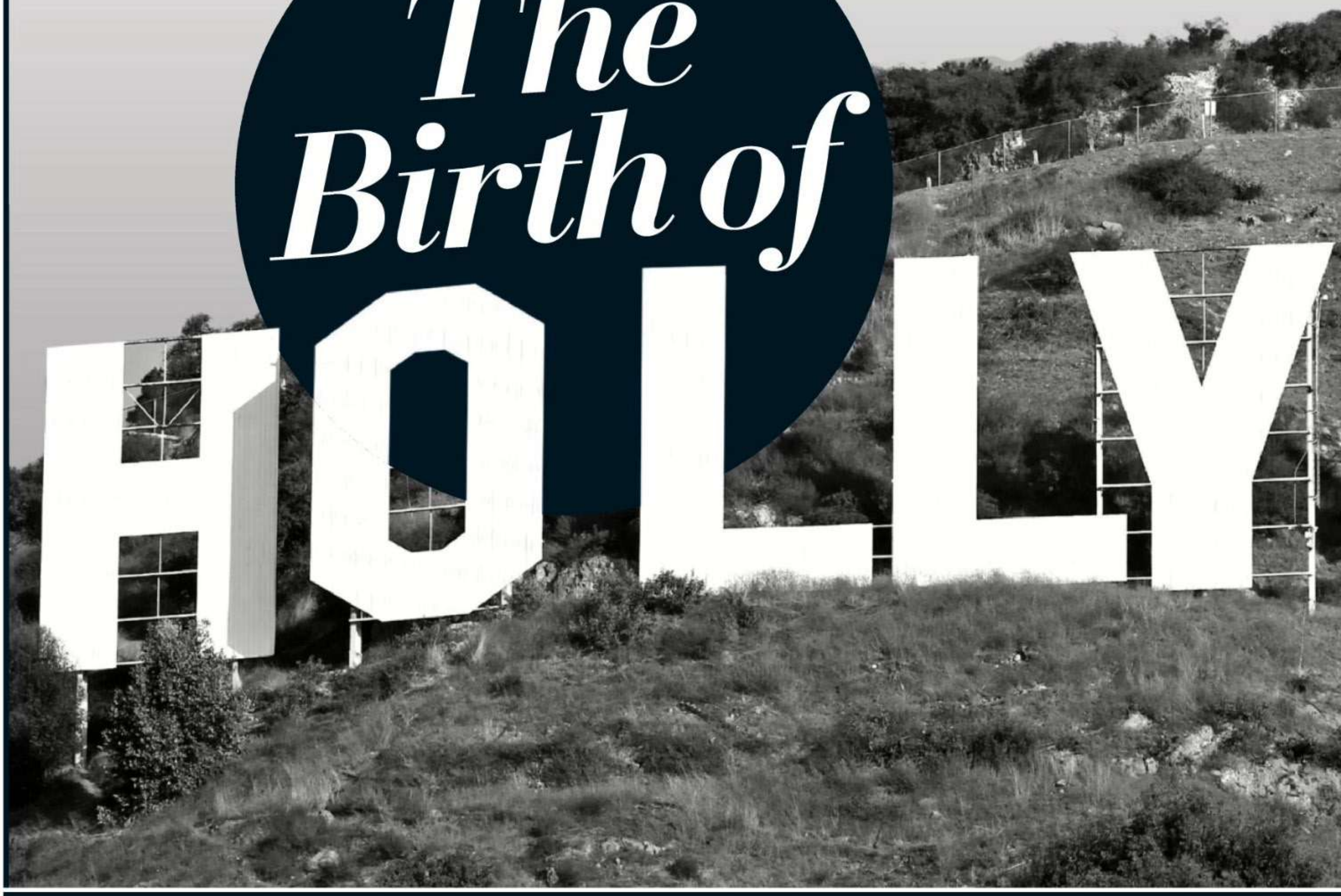




The Birth of HOLLY



How four penniless Jewish immigrant siblings changed the face of entertainment forever and wrote their own fairy tale

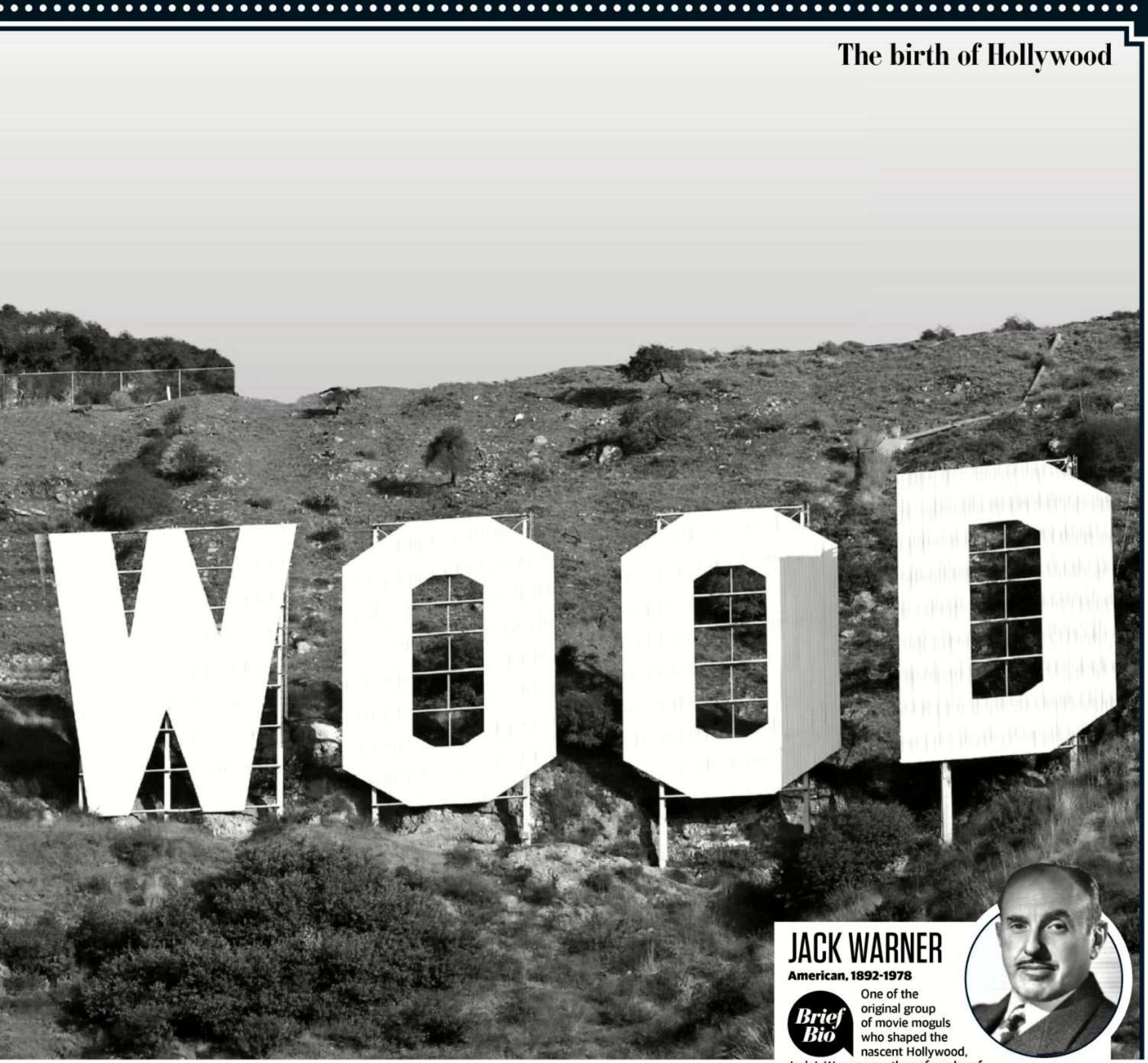
Written by Robin Brown

Jack Warner always wanted to be famous. Actually, make that adored, powerful, rich and famous. Born Jacob Warner in impoverished Canada to Jewish immigrant parents in 1892, he changed his name to something more theatrical: Jack L Warner. As a young man he grew up obsessed with images, hanging around photography studios in the hope of being used for test shots. While his brothers were recognising the potential of early film projectors, investing in a Kinetoscope projector, Jack made money singing in theatres, showing little interest in - or aptitude for - the less glamorous side of show business.

Willed on by his parents and clubbing together with his brothers - Albert, Harry and Sam - Jack toured the Northern states showing old prints of *The Great Train Robbery*, drawing enough cash to buy a series of local theatres and launch their own distribution company, the Duquesne Amusement Company. However, the brothers' ambition didn't stop at a network of provincial theatres. The Warners had their sights set on global domination.

At the turn of the century many others were also heading west to seek a new life. One of these was Harvey Wilcox, who bought 160 acres (64 hectares) of land to the west of Los Angeles in the ironic hope of founding a conservative community. On the train from Kansas, Wilcox and his wife got chatting to a woman who talked of her summer home: Hollywood.

Wilcox's vision of founding a community became a reality and in 1910 Hollywood officially



became a part of Los Angeles. At the same time, a group of actors and directors - drawn to the area by the sunny climate, lack of taxes and freedom from patents issued by Thomas Edison's Motion Picture Patents Company - started shooting motion pictures in what is now the film-making capital of the world. In 1911 Hollywood got its first studio, when the Blondeau Tavern on Sunset Boulevard became the Nestor Film Company - firing the starting pistol on a gold rush that would take place over the next two decades.

A few years later, in 1917, Jack Warner had been dispatched to Los Angeles where he bought the rights to *My Four Years In Germany*, a memoir by the US ambassador to Germany who lived in that country during the First World War. In the face of threats from local theatre owners and impressive offers from distributors, the brothers held fast and premiered the movie themselves, making a small fortune in the process. Riding anti-German sentiment following the war, the film was a smash. Warner Brothers now had a place at the top table of American film producers.

In 1918, the siblings formed Warner Brothers West Coast Studios, later incorporated as the more recognisable Warner Brothers in 1923, and moved to Hollywood. Jack shared production duties with brother Sam while Harry and Albert sold distribution rights and they launched enthusiastically into a series of low-budget farces. However, the films were not a success and the company dangled on the edge of a

JACK WARNER

American, 1892-1978

Brief Bio

One of the original group of movie moguls who shaped the nascent Hollywood, Jack L Warner was the cofounder of Warner Bros Studios. With brothers Harry, Sam and Albert he launched Warner Brothers in 1923 and became the dominant force of the four siblings.

Equally feared and admired, Jack was the typical mogul of Hollywood's Golden Age and was known for his ruthlessness in business. Neither actors nor directors were immune from Jack. He even disposed of his own brothers when they outlived their usefulness, discarded his wife and son when he grew tired of them and was known for casual cruelty to staff.

A notorious philanderer, Jack abandoned his wife and son for another woman in 1935. Following the death of his much-loved brother Sam in 1927, Jack's frosty relationship with Harry and Albert came to a head in 1956 when the former sold the studio's rights to films made before 1950 for a paltry sum and later arranged to buy back Warner's stock that had previously been sold, installing himself as president. The brothers never spoke again and Jack refused to attend Harry's funeral in 1958. In 1969, Jack was seen as the last of a dying breed of studio heads and, after seeing his power gradually slip away, retired. Warner Brothers remains one of Hollywood's most powerful studios to this day.

THE CAMERAMAN

Innovation was key in early film cameras, with devices bulky, hard to move and requiring constant hand cranking. Having to crank a camera while focusing and aiming was difficult, so shooting was often static. Smaller cameras like the Mitchell Standard were introduced in the 1920s but the advent of sound recording posed more problems – namely the issue of sound emanating from the mechanism while recording. Stylistic innovations were slow to appear in early films due to the difficulty of using equipment.

THE DIRECTOR (HAL ROACH)

Directors were rarely used for the ability to craft sophisticated movies in the silent era – a dynamic that continued into the talkie era. Technical knowledge and the ability to work quickly were more highly prized, with many early directors sourced from producers, actors, writers or entrepreneurs. Hal Roach was an exception, with a career lasting for several decades and well into the advent of talkies.

Making Movies

The main players behind the 1919 picture *Bumping into Broadway*

THE STAR (HAROLD LLOYD)

Stars could earn a lot of money, depending on their levels of fame. Silent film stars such as Charlie Chaplin, Harold Lloyd and Buster Keaton could command film deals worth tens of millions of dollars in today's money. Most had a strong understanding of their appeal and how it should be conveyed – enjoying significant creative freedom. That would all gradually change under the studio system of the late-1920s and throughout the 1930s.

Four brothers with a dream: Harry, Sam, Jack and Albert Warner

Al Jolson in *The Jazz Singer*, Warner Bros' famous first 'talkie'

THE SUPPORTING ARTIST (SNUB POLLARD)

Supporting artists were kept in steady employment during the churn-'em-out days of silent films. Skills learned in vaudeville and physical theatre translated well in silent films, though many less polished artists found that their unattractive or heavily-accented voices and inability to learn scripts harmed their prospect when talkies took over. Snub Pollard enjoyed some success in the silent era but found mostly bit-part and extra work from the 1930s onward.

THE LEADING LADY (BEBE DANIELS)

Most films had a female protagonist opposite the leading man. The actresses had often learned their craft in theatres, but were mainly cast for their looks. Romances between prominent actors and actresses were not uncommon – studios were known to encourage or even fabricate relationships to generate publicity. Many careers did not survive the transition to talkies – Bebe Daniels was one who prospered.

Jack Warner in 1973, shortly after he had been ousted from his own studio

financial chasm – moving to a down-at-heel neighbourhood that locals referred to as Poverty Row. Salvation was to come in the most unlikely of forms.

A German Shepherd called Rin Tin Tin proved to be the saviour of Warner Brothers. The trained dog – rescued from a battlefield by a US soldier in the First World War – became the star of a series of silent films of derring-do. The canine appeared in over 27 Hollywood films for Warner Bros, becoming famous around the world. Noting Warner Brothers' flirtation with bankruptcy, Jack called Rin Tin Tin "the mortgage lifter." The German Shepherd was so popular in Hollywood that the Academy of Motion Pictures voted the dog best actor in 1929; sadly the Academy insisted that a human actor take the Oscar. The Rin Tin Tin films were written by Darryl F Zanuck, who later became Jack Warner's executive producer and right-hand man before his dislike of the Warners drove him to what would become 20th Century Fox. Adding names such as director Ernst Lubitsch and star John Barrymore to Warner Brothers' roster boosted sales and also lent the studio some respectability.

"Noting Warner Brothers' flirtation with bankruptcy, Jack called Rin Tin Tin 'the mortgage lifter'"

On the back of these successes – and fearing being shut out by the established studios – the Warners expanded, purchasing theatre companies, building a laboratory to develop film and investing in new hardware. Warners led the way with a vertical model. Rather than being a cog in a larger mechanism, the studio owned it all, from production to distribution to exhibition. Most moguls came from theatre companies so already had distribution tied up (some had virtual monopolies in certain cities) while adding production allowed for the greatest return on investment. The Warners had to beg, steal and borrow to be able to take on the existing studios.

As well as Warner Brothers, four other big studios were to emerge in the 1920s, which would become Hollywood studios recognised today: Paramount was headed by Adolph Zukor and had a reputation for quality silent films; 20th Century Fox was created from a merger in 1935, headed by Warner's old colleague Darryl F Zanuck; MGM had a huge talent roster and produced many of the era's most famous pictures; RKO concentrated their efforts on films noir.

By the 1920s, most US film production occurred in or near Hollywood. By the end of the decade, there were 20 Hollywood studios averaging about 800 film releases in a year – far in excess of modern Hollywood. Films were being manufactured in modular format, aping the success of Henry Ford's production-line process. Swashbucklers, historical or biblical epics and melodramas were most popular, though Warners would blaze a trail with gangster capers and Universal became known for its horror films. Meanwhile, Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton, Harold Lloyd and Laurel & Hardy were popular for their comedic movies.

The studio system that emerged enforced long-term contracts for stars and rigid control of both them and directors. This system ensured strong profits and a de facto monopoly – by 1929, the 'Big Five' studios produced over 90 per cent of the fiction titles in the States. Studios also distributed their films internationally, hogging the profits at every step of film-making and distribution.

The studios didn't just control the logistics of film-making though. They would snap up promising, good-looking young actors and actresses and construct a new public image for them, often changing their names, putting them through vocal coaching – a

The Birth Of Cinema

By the late-19th century a number of basic methods for showing moving images existed, but none were able to show genuine sequential images filmed by one camera, usually relying on optical illusions or a bank of multiple cameras to replicate moving images. In 1888, Thomas Edison registered a patent for a device that would "do for the eye what the phonograph does for the ear" – record and reproduce objects in motion. Despite his realisation of the Kinetoscope, the invention could only be used by one person at a time. Edison recognised that films projected for large audiences would be a lot more profitable.

The inventor backed another device, the Thomas Armat-designed Vitascope, and publicly demonstrated it on 23 April 1896, at Koster and Bial's Music Hall in New York City. The audience was treated to moving pictures of dancing, a beach, burlesque boxing match and snippets from plays – all were described gushingly as 'wonderfully real and singularly exhilarating.'

It was the first public showing of a motion picture on a screen in the States, a feat recognised today in a plaque erected next to Macy's Department Store in New York.

The event opened up the way for motion pictures to be developed on a mass scale. Ever the businessman, Edison soon dispensed with the Vitascope, patenting his own version, the Projecting Kinetoscope, a few months later.

From silent shows to Hollywood's golden age

-1897-
MOVING PICTURE SHOWS
Thomas Edison creates and markets his own moving-picture camera and projector system, catalysing a race among theatre owners to develop their own systems to show moving pictures in the nickelodeons and theatre halls they own across the US.

-1906-
THE FIRST FILM
The Story Of The Kelly Gang, an Australian film on outlaw Ned Kelly is the world's first full-length feature film. It is first shown in Melbourne, Australia before going on tour, being shown in the UK in 1908. Dialogue is synchronised live during screenings.

-1910-
DESTINATION: HOLLYWOOD
DW Griffith, Mark Pickford and Lionel Barrymore are among a group of actors and directors who begin filming in the village of Hollywood, a suburb of Los Angeles. The results include *In Old California* and several more films.

-1919-
ARTISTS UNITED
Charlie Chaplin, Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks Sr form United Artists and take a studio on Santa Monica Boulevard. The actors, along with DW Griffiths, wield enormous power and wealth as some of the biggest stars of their day.

-1920-
BIRTH OF MGM
Metro Pictures Corporation is sold to the Loew's theatre chain – paving the way for the creators of the studio system and contractors of many of the biggest stars of the day, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, in 1924.

-1922-
MORAL CODE
The Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA) is formed in response to a number of early scandals. The body appoints Will H Hays, who will introduce infamous Hays Code.

Studio Players

Adolph Zukor
Paramount Pictures

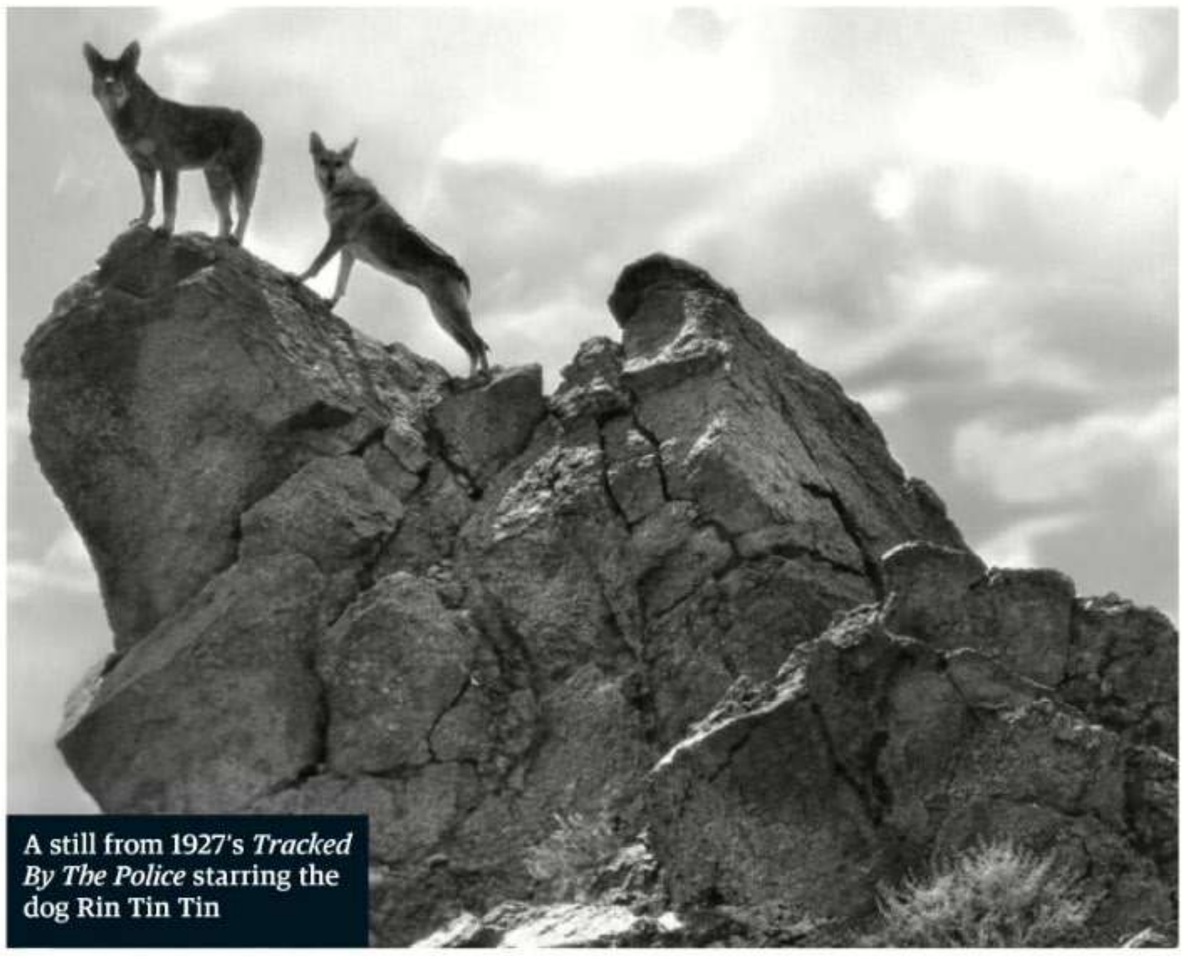
A Jewish-Hungarian immigrant, Zukor was already a successful businessman by the time he ventured into the film industry, forming a studio that evolved into Paramount Pictures. A polymath, Zukor directed and produced, and as chairman for many years oversaw the consolidation of production, distribution and exhibition within the same company – ensuring Paramount's place as one of the Big Five studios in the early days of Hollywood.

David O Selznick RKO

RKO was ailing when the 29-year-old Selznick, following stints at MGM and Paramount, took over production at the studio, Before long, the studio had signed a young Katharine Hepburn, recruited an impressive roster of behind-the-camera talent and made one of the defining films of Hollywood's Golden Age: *King Kong*. Selznick would move back to MGM before starting his own production company and producing, among others, *Gone With The Wind*.

Louis B Mayer MGM

Another Russian immigrant, Louis B Mayer rose to power through his ownership of a raft of theatres and his own production company, later to become MGM. Under Mayer, the studio dominated the industry and had the top stars in Hollywood – a result of his determination to have 'more stars than the heavens.' Mayer was also one of the founders of Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences – famous for its annual Academy Awards.



A still from 1927's *Tracked By The Police* starring the dog Rin Tin Tin

necessity for many in the emerging talkie era – and even forcing some to undergo plastic surgery. Studios would choose which films their star made, arrange their romantic lives and force them to adhere to strict moral codes. There was significant irony to this. Jack Warner was used to having his pick of the starlets, enjoying the power that came with the success of the Warner Brothers' talkies.

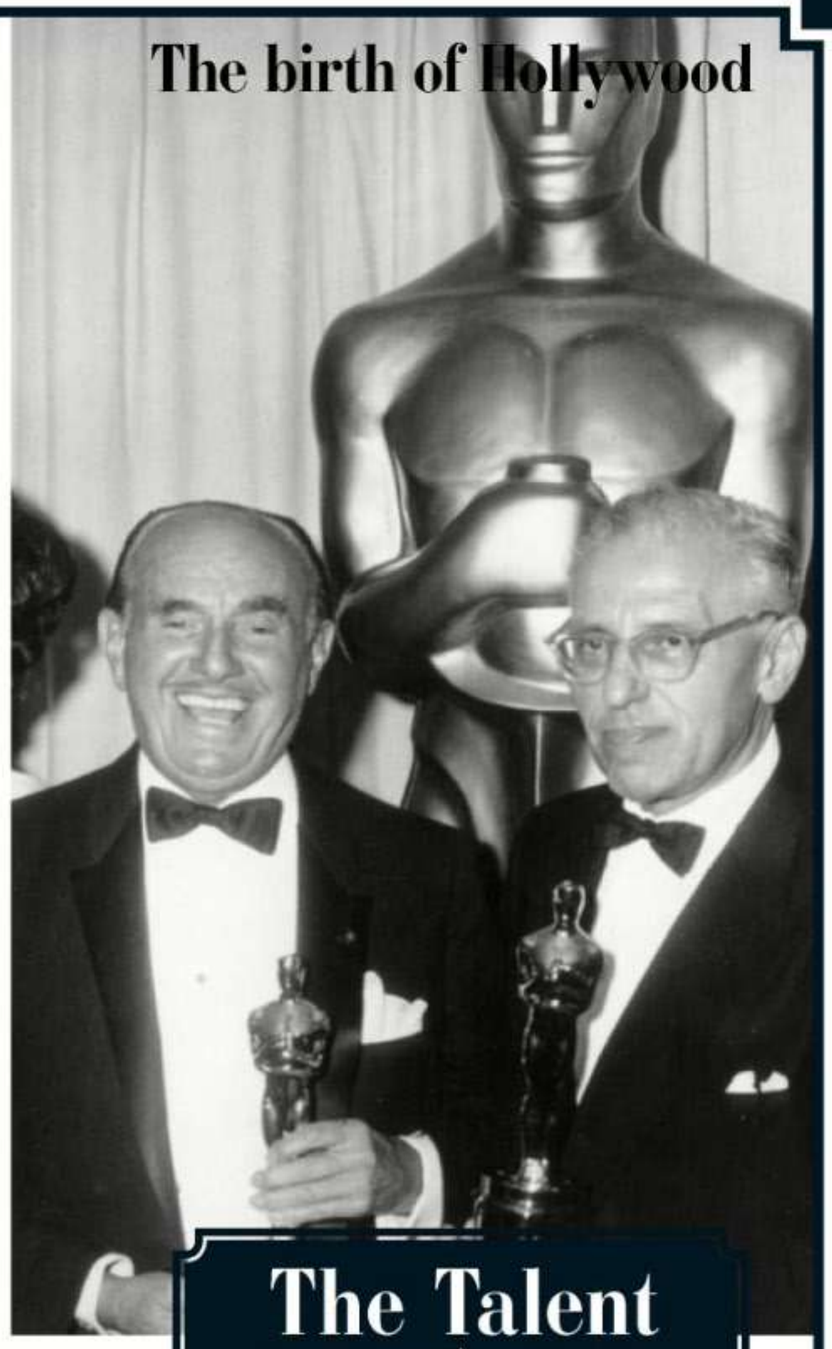
In 1925, buoyed by financial and moral support from United Artists – an independent founded by Douglas Fairbanks Sr, Mark Pickford and Charlie Chaplin – the Warners embarked on a set of acquisitions, appointments and impulsive purchases. Chief among them was a bunch of old machinery from a radio station, because Sam and Jack had an idea. While silent films had their appeal – they were universal due to their lack of a specific language and sound-synchronisation technology was appallingly basic – the two brothers recognised the fantastic possibilities offered by talking pictures.

Chief among the new technologies they pursued was the new Vitaphone film sound process that allowed for synchronisation of sound and moving images, with sounds played on a gramophone. By the mid-1920s it was clear to Jack, despite his initial personal doubts, that the studio that successfully developed sound would reap immense rewards. Other studios were investing heavily in the technology so Warners couldn't afford to be left behind. While the resulting Vitaphone technology was basic, Warner Brothers quickly kitted out their theatres with new kit, cementing them as the leaders of the new media but at the cost of $3 million; it was an enormous gamble.

Championed by Sam Warner as a cheaper alternative to paying for live music in theatres, and in the face of resistance from Harry, the new technology paved the way for 1926's *Don Juan*. Although music and sound effects featured, there was no synchronised speech. Still, the reception to the film was overwhelmingly positive – it had changed the face of the industry. But while the studio enjoyed critical success, the bottom line wasn't nearly so healthy and the cost of producing the film and fitting out theatres with the new Vitaphone projectors almost wiped them out.

With the studio mortgaged up to the hilt, the brothers embarked on another ambitious plan: the next project would feature synchronised dialogue. 1927's *The Jazz Singer* was the first to include speech and was a smash hit, earning Warner Brothers millions of dollars, despite a budget that was considered exorbitant at the time, concerns

"Sam Warner fell into a coma and died at the age of 40, the day before The Jazz Singer's premiere"



-1927-
TALK TALK
The start of Hollywood's Golden Age, with the release of *The Jazz Singer*. Starring Al Jolson, it's the first to have synchronised sound, though only a few minutes of the movie had synchronised vocals, with most of the rest being a silent film.

-1929-
OSCAR TIME
The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS) dispenses the first Academy Awards – now known worldwide as Oscars – in May 1929. *The Jazz Singer* is given a special award, commemorating its impact on the industry.

-1930-
HOLLYWOOD ROYALTY
MGM stars Clark Gable and Joan Crawford star together in *Dance, Fools, Dance* – the first of eight features teaming them together. The pair are believed to have had an affair during their golden box-office run in the 1930s.

-1935-
LIVING COLOUR
Becky Sharp, an adaptation of *Vanity Fair*, is Hollywood's first full-length feature film in Technicolor. It paves the way for colour films in the years leading up to WWII, including *Gone With The Wind* and *The Wizard Of Oz*.

-1937-
DISNEY LANDS
Walt Disney premieres *Snow White And The Seven Dwarfs*, the first-ever feature-length animated film. With international earnings of $8m it is the highest-grossing sound film of all time for a brief period.

-1939-
KING OF HOLLYWOOD
Gone With The Wind, with a gestation period of several years and a budget of $4m, premieres. The Civic War epic confirms producer David O Selznick and star Clark Gable as leading lights of the era.

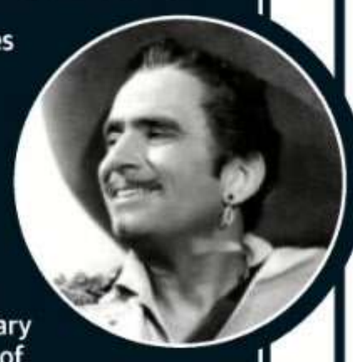
The Warner Brothers' studio lot in its early years

The Talent

Charlie Chaplin
United Artists

The London-born actor enjoyed a meteoric rise as star performer and reliable, productive director within three years of moving to the US; his tramp character becoming synonymous with the silent era. Chaplin would become one of the most powerful figures in Hollywood before being denied re-entry into the US due to his alleged political views.

Douglas Fairbanks Sr
United Artists



Known for his comedies and swashbucklers, Fairbanks Sr successfully transitioned from the silent era to talkies and cemented his place as Hollywood royalty with his marriage to Mary Pickford and founding of United Artists.

Mary Pickford
Paramount/United Artists

Dubbed 'America's Sweetheart', Mary Pickford was a child actress who became arguably the most popular star of the silent films generation. In 1916, she was the first star to become a millionaire, went on to marry Douglas Fairbanks and founded United Artists studio with her husband and Charlie Chaplin.

The Early Years Of Hollywood By The Numbers

800

The number of movies produced, per year, in Hollywood at the height of its popularity

130,000

Number of residents in Hollywood by 1925 – up from a mere 30,000 in 1919

1923

The erection of the Hollywood sign; it first read 'Hollywoodland' but lost the suffix in 1949

$1.6billion

Inflation-adjusted gross earned by *Gone With The Wind* on release in 1939 – still the highest of any film

400

The number of US movie theatres wired for sound in 1927; by 1930 silent films were almost obsolete

$3.9million

The cost of the silent era's most expensive film, the 1925 version of *Ben-Hur*

2,500

Total number of screen performers in *Gone With The Wind*

Sam Warner with his wife Lina and daughter Lita in 1925

over their star's acting abilities and the quality of the script. Realising Jolson's claim to the audience that "you ain't heard nothin' yet", Warner's stock went stratospheric; at $132 a share it was worth nearly seven times the value prior to *The Jazz Singer*. The gamble had paid off, and handsomely too – the film ensured the studio was now swimming in cash.

The celebrations would be short-lived, though. Jack had noticed that his brother Sam had been struggling with his balance and suffering from nosebleeds – the result of undiagnosed infections caused by abscessed teeth. Following months of ill health, Sam Warner fell into a coma and died at the age of 40, the day before *The Jazz Singer*'s premiere.

While he was devastated by the loss of his closest brother, this was Jack's moment. Without Sam, he became the studio's head of production, inheriting his brother's drive but combining it with a fire and no-nonsense attitude. Unlike Sam, who was generally liked, Jack gained a reputation as an uncaring boss – happy to slash costs and lay off staff for the sake of the bottom line. Under his leadership the studio gambled the astonishing sum of $100 million on the purchase of rival film studio First National. When The Wall Street Crash of 1929 – while not denting the film industry as badly as other industries – occured it meant that, for a while, money was tight.

The studio's response was to ramp up production to a staggering 80 films a year by 1929. With no one to check his behaviour, Jack became notorious as one of the most unpleasant men in Hollywood – in a town filled with unpleasant men no mean achievement. Further acquisitions and expansion would make Warner Bros one of the Big Five studios and Jack Warner one of Hollywood's most powerful players – he was, by this point, a huge success by any reasonable measure. Warner Bros had matched, then bought out and finally beaten rivals into submission, becoming the equal of the four biggest studios, MGM, 20th Century Fox, RKO and Paramount by 1930. It had taken 20 years but the Warner Brothers had done it.

The impact of Warner Bros is hard to overstate. With the release of *The Jazz Singer* the brothers revolutionised the industry – some stars were finished overnight while others saw new opportunities opening up. Silent films were dead within one or two years. Beyond that the structure of Warner Bros – with stars under contract, films made in-house at studios, owned outright and distributed to theatres owned by the studio – combined with pioneering use of new technologies and rampant acquisition of theatre chains and other studios amounted to an economic powerhouse. The four brothers were instrumental in introducing the studio system that Hollywood would become known for – and it was unbeatable.

"A classic rags-to-riches story, worthy of a script from one of Hollywood's greatest studios"

From poor outsiders, immigrants, they had sweated, gambled, bartered and sacrificed to reach the apex of Hollywood. Jack Warner – who had once sung, badly, for pennies – was a powerful studio boss; the Golden Age of Hollywood arriving. For an ambitious boy who had always yearned for power, respect and adulation, it was a classic rags-to-riches story, worthy of a film script from one of Hollywood's greatest studios.

NEXT ISSUE
Hollywood's hidden history
Discover the dark secrets that lurked behind the glittering facade of Tinseltown's golden age

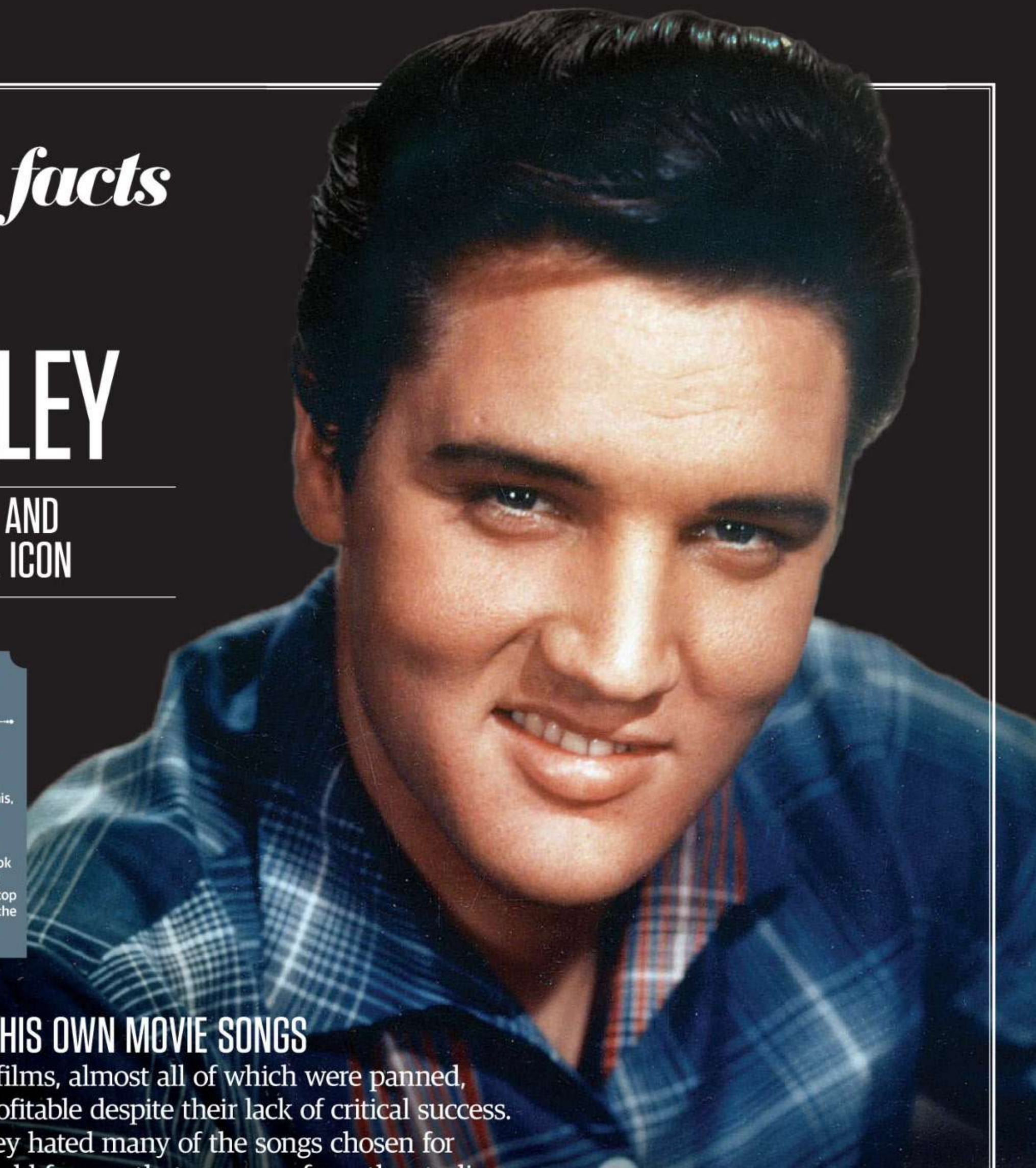
Top 5 facts
ELVIS PRESLEY

SINGER, ACTOR AND INTERNATIONAL ICON

ELVIS AARON PRESLEY
American, 1935-1977

Brief Bio

Elvis Presley was born in Tupelo, Mississippi and moved to Memphis, Tennessee when he was 13 years old. After a string of rejections and failed auditions, his music career took off in 1954. In 1956, his single *Heartbreak Hotel* shot to the top of the US pop charts, setting the precedent for the worldwide success that followed.



01 HE HATED HIS OWN MOVIE SONGS

Presley made 31 films, almost all of which were panned, but they were profitable despite their lack of critical success. Reportedly Presley hated many of the songs chosen for his films and would frequently turn away from the studio microphone, having difficulty singing the terrible material.

02 America was shocked by his dancing moves

When Presley first performed without a guitar in 1956 his gyrating hips caused outrage across the US, earning him the nickname Elvis the Pelvis. Subsequently a Florida judge dubbed him a "savage" with music that was "undermining the youth." When his unique dancing was forbidden at a gig, he waggled his finger in protest instead.

03 He had a pet chimpanzee

Presley adopted a chimpanzee called Scatter in the early-1960s. Scatter was infamous for causing trouble and was known for pulling up women's dresses and skirts, a trait that Elvis found very amusing. Presley also dressed the chimp in suits, Hawaiian shirts and caps and had him chauffeured around the city.

04 He was convinced people were plotting his death

When four men rushed onto the stage during one of his shows, Presley became obsessed with the idea that Mike Stone, the man his wife cheated on him with, was trying to kill him. He raged that "Stone must die" and his bodyguard got a quote for a contract killing but Presley decided to abandon the idea, saying it was all "a bit heavy."

05 Criminals reformed because of his music's inspiration

A criminal serving a four-month sentence in jail for stealing tyres heard Presley's 1960 hit *It's Now Or Never* while behind bars. He was so inspired that he vowed to pursue a career in music once he had been released. That young man later went on to become the three-time Grammy-winning artist and international icon Barry White.

© Alamy

DRUGS, DEATH AND DEBAUCHERY INSIDE THE DREAM FACTORY

Hollywood's Hidden History

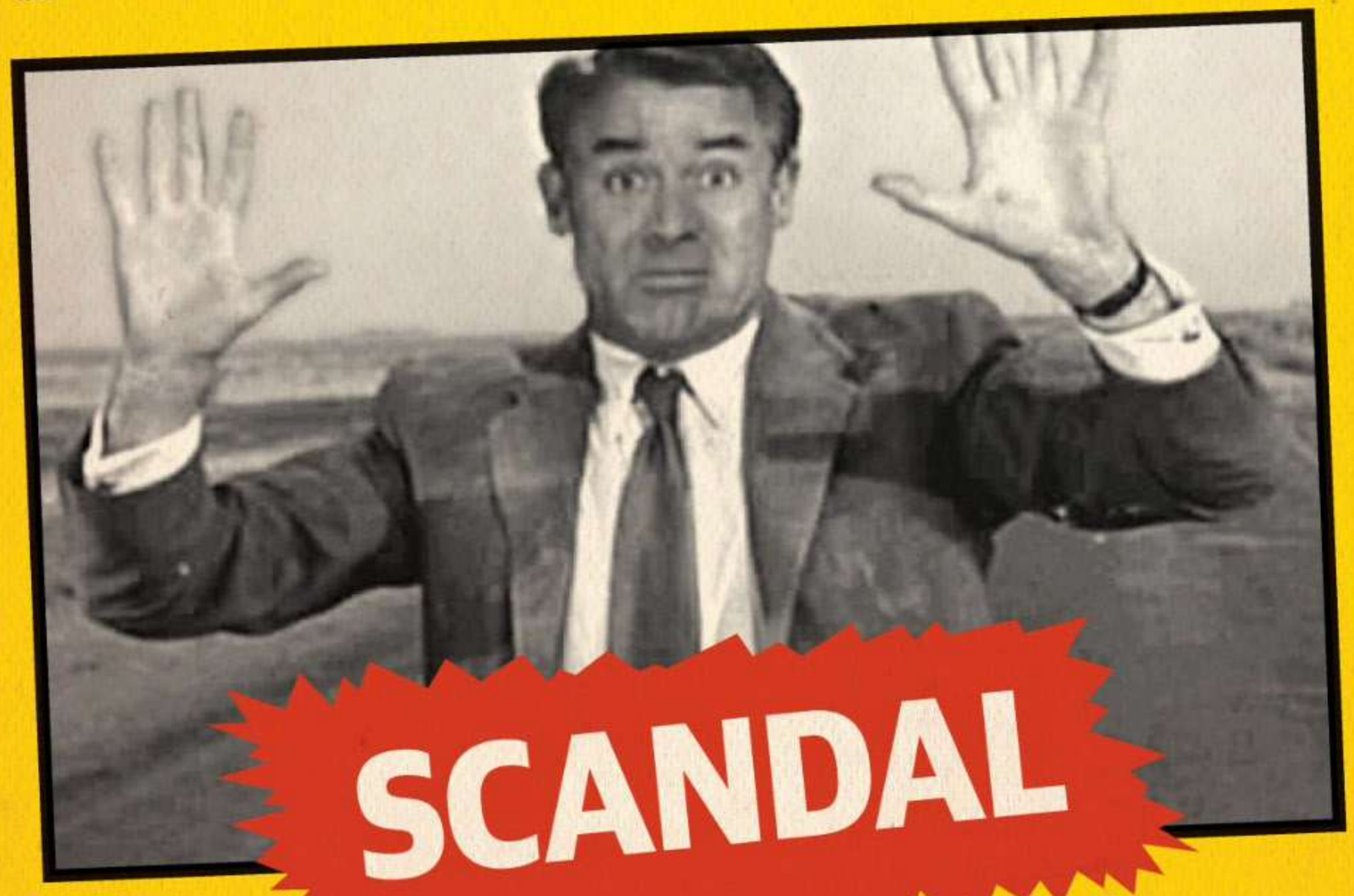
Written by Owen Williams

Passion, death, fashion and suntans. Beautiful people and freaks of nature working hand-in-hand; screen idols viewed as role models around the world engaging in outrageous debauchery: it can only be Hollywood.

Part and parcel of Hollywood's golden age were the scandal magazines, feeding off the new obsession with movie stars and competing to come up with the most salacious stories imaginable - whether or not they were true. In the 1930s, people got their gossip from the likes of scandal sheets *New Movie* and *Coast Reporter*, while in the 1950s they might have chosen *Photoplay* or the queen of them all, *Confidential*. While names of these magazines changed over time, the agenda remained the same: peering into the lives of the famous to demonstrate that they were even crazier than the rest of us. Much of what they wrote was outright libelous, but stars rarely sued, for fear of exposing the occasional unwanted accuracy to unwelcome attention.

In modern times, USA's movie capital can still boast its fair share of scandal, but today's film industry is downright tame compared to its earliest years, when murder, sex, drugs and drinking seemed to be part of the job description. People from the poorest backgrounds were suddenly earning fortunes and loved by millions; gangsters were menacing studio heads (and some studio heads were menacing gangsters); child actors were fed amphetamines; and wild parties were going horribly awry. Somewhere, somehow, in among this debauched madness, films were still getting made.

Early Hollywood may have been a dream factory, but for many stars on its punishing production line, it was a nightmare - and a nightmare the gossip rags delighted in making public knowledge.



SCANDAL

"TODAY'S FILM INDUSTRY IS DOWNRIGHT TAME COMPARED TO ITS EARLIEST YEARS, WHEN MURDER, SEX, DRUGS AND DRINKING SEEMED TO BE PART OF THE JOB DESCRIPTION"

THE STAR DRUGGED BY STUDIO EXECS!

Uppers, downers, and The Wizard Of Oz

Actors worked hard in early Hollywood, churning out several films a year, if not more. Children often had it the worst of all, though, forced to work long hours on film after film, seven days a week. If child star Judy Garland was to be believed, a steady diet of drugs was part of the package that kept them upright.

Garland was under contract to MGM from the age of 13: older than most child actors but too young for adult roles. She starred with Mickey Rooney in more than two-dozen movies including *Love Finds Andy Hardy*, *Babes In Arms* and *Girl Crazy*. In contrast to his family-friendly, wholesome screen image, the teenage Rooney was himself an inveterate womaniser and gambler, assigned a full-time staffer whose job was to keep him out of trouble. He wasn't particularly successful.

Garland's own vice was the 'pep pills' forced on her by the studio over concerns about her weight. That was a whimsical euphemism for strong amphetamines, administered to suppress Garland's appetite and keep her energy levels high. The speeding star would then be given barbiturates at the end of the day so that she could sleep.

Aged just 16 she was cast in her most famous role as Dorothy in *The Wizard Of Oz*, in 1938. Her problems continued as her weight drew constant unwelcome attention from studio mogul Louis B Mayer and his executive underlings. Understandably insecure, her drug intake continued and increased. The regime kept her physique slim and got her through the difficult shoot - no fewer than five directors came and went during *Oz*'s mad production.

To an extent, her studio-sanctioned cocktail of uppers and downers brought her success. She won a special Academy Award for her performance in *The Wizard Of Oz*, and the film she would forever be associated with made her a Hollywood icon. But she never got over her drug dependency and her fame came at a high cost. Plagued with self-doubt about her looks and abilities, she wrote in her autobiography that she felt MGM had stolen her youth. She was found dead in her bathroom in 1969, aged just 47, from an accidental overdose of barbiturates.

©Alamy

Cary Grant was awarded an honorary Academy Award in 1970

ACTOR ON ACID!

Hollywood star admits experiments with LSD

Born Archie Leech in Bristol in 1904, by the 1950s the renamed Cary Grant was one of the biggest movie stars in the world. Some stars relax with a round of golf. Others raise horses. Many drink. But Grant's vice was more surprising: he loved nothing better than to trip out on LSD. While the likes of Timothy Leary espoused the drug to the counter culture, Grant could be found enthusing about it to *Ladies Home Journal* and *Good Housekeeping*.

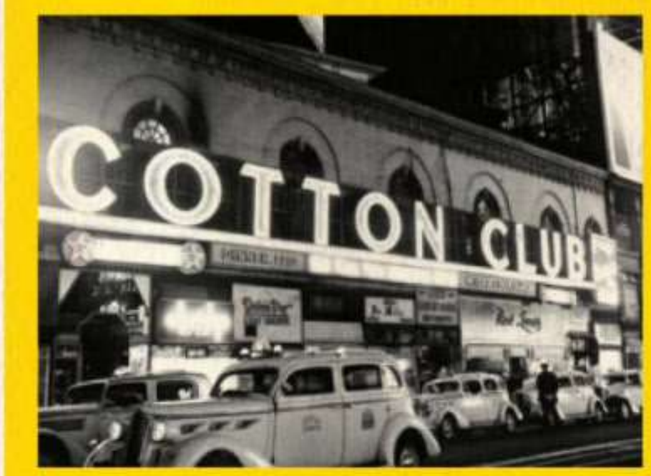
Grant had long been interested in mysticism and once claimed to have cured himself of a knife injury by 'self hypnosis.' So when his third wife Betsy Drake began undergoing experimental LSD treatment for help with her anxiety attacks, Grant became extremely interested in reports of her experiences. Meditation and yoga hadn't worked for him. Maybe acid was the answer? Grant signed up for the treatment himself in 1958, and became a devotee. He used it more than 100 times before it was made illegal in 1966 and may have continued afterward, but was careful enough not to say so.

"MEDITATION AND YOGA HADN'T WORKED FOR HIM. MAYBE ACID WAS THE ANSWER?"

In 1959, supposedly doing press for the film *Operation Petticoat*, he was much more interested in talking about tripping. "I have been born again", he told a surprised reporter for the *New York Herald Tribune*. "I have faced things about myself, which I never admitted, which I didn't know were there. You can do more than you ever dreamed you could do [...] That moment when your conscious meets your subconscious is a hell of a wrench. You feel the whole top of your head lifting off."

Grant remained an enthusiastic acid advocate until the end of his life, but others noticed unfortunate changes in his personality. Writer and director Donald Brooks remarked that Grant became disappointingly "placid and unquestioning" after he started using the drug, while screenwriter Peter Stone found Grant's constant cosmic claptrap annoying. Actor David Niven was also concerned for his friend, but the famous director Alfred Hitchcock was just amused. He said that he thought Grant was "attracted to LSD because those letters in England stand for pounds, shillings and pence!"

HOLLYWOOD'S PLAYGROUND



What was the Cotton Club?

It was a nightclub located first in Harlem, New York, and later in that city's theatre district. Heavyweight boxing champion Jack Johnson ran it from the time it opened in 1920 until its final closure in 1940. While Johnson ran the club, its owner was the gangster Owney Madden, who bought it while he was still in Sing-Sing Prison. Madden was principally a bootlegger, so a venue for selling his liquor to Prohibition crowds was ideal.

Which stars went to it?

The Cotton Club was whites-only, frequented by high-fliers from Broadway and the film industry. However, any number of famous black musicians of the day played there, such as Duke Ellington, Ella Fitzgerald, Lena Horne, Count Basie, Louis Armstrong, Nat King Cole and Fats Waller. Frequent celebrity visitors included the likes of Judy Garland, Mae West and Al Jolson.

Why was it scandalous?

Most of the Cotton Club's patrons, no matter how starry, were law-abiding citizens enjoying the excellent stage shows: even during Prohibition it was only illegal to sell booze, not to buy it. Still, the fact remains that it was an institution owned and run by mobsters. Its stance on alcohol during Prohibition saw it briefly shut down by the authorities in 1925, and it temporarily closed again in 1936 following race riots in Harlem when the neighborhood was deemed unsafe for whites. Ralph Capone, Al's older brother, ran a Chicago offshoot of the club and the New York original was closed for good in 1940 following a federal tax investigation.

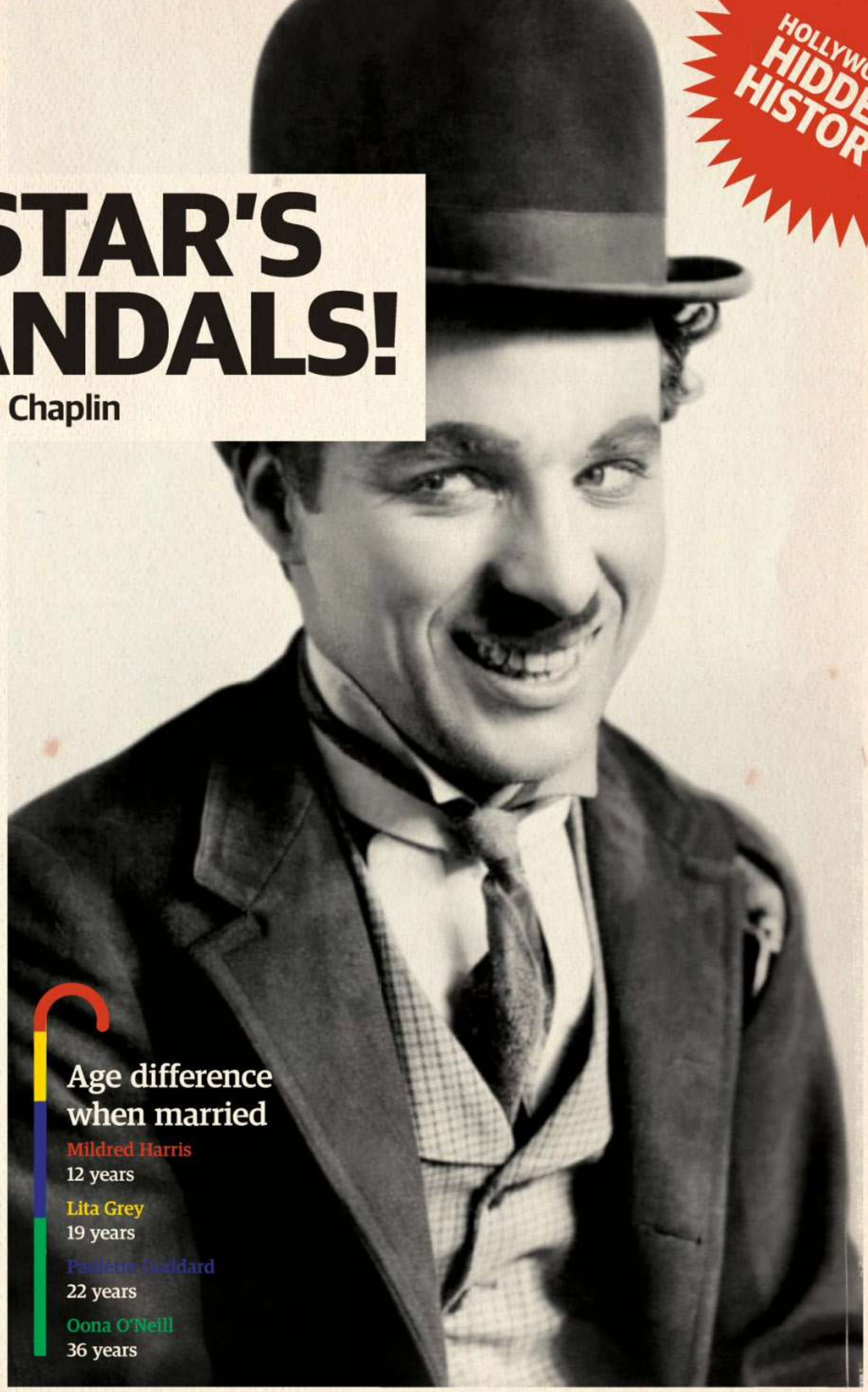
SILENT STAR'S SEX SCANDALS!

The teenage wives of Charlie Chaplin

Charles Spencer, more commonly known as Charlie Chaplin, was perhaps the most recognisable and loved of all the stars of film's early, silent years, but as with many of his contemporaries, there was a darker side to his fame. Scandal seemed to gravitate towards him. One of his favourite leading ladies, Mabel Normand, was implicated in two murders, and Chaplin himself was present at a yacht party during which actor, director and studio mogul Thomas Ince died in mysterious circumstances.

Chaplin gained the most infamy for his string of short-lived marriages, and for the average age of his wives. His first, actress Mildred Harris, was only 17 years old (Chaplin was 29) when they were hastily hitched in 1918, prompted by a pregnancy scare. They divorced in 1920 and four years later Chaplin quietly married another teen actress, the 16-year-old Lita Grey, for the same reason. This time the pregnancy was genuine. Their son, Charles Jr, was born six months later, but Grey's 1926 application for divorce cited Chaplin's infidelity, abuse and "perverted sexual desires."

His third wife, Paulette Goddard (yet another actress), was 21 when they began their relationship in 1932. They were married in 1937 but drifted apart and separated a year later. After that, in 1943, he married the 18-year old Oona O'Neill. Chaplin himself was 54 by this point, and at the same time embroiled in a paternity suit with the 23-year-old actress Joan Barry. This was his biggest test of all, since his relationship with Barry had seen him fall foul of the Mann Act: an old law prohibiting "the transportation of women across state boundaries for sexual purposes." He was acquitted but admonished by the judge for "moral turpitude", beginning the saga that would see him eventually branded a communist and expelled from the US during the McCarthy trials.



WIFE MURDERER? Did the famous director kill Lisa Rosenthal?

Fritz Lang directed three of the 1920s' biggest films in Germany - *Metropolis*, *Dr Mabuse The Gambler* and *Die Nibelungen* - before he fled to the US from the Nazi regime in 1933. He went on to make famous noirs and Westerns, but would he have been as welcomed in the States had it been more widely suspected that he'd killed his first wife?

Recent documents reveal that Lang tried to hide that his marriage to Lisa Rosenthal in 1920 ever happened. A bullet from Lang's revolver killed her after she caught her husband having an affair with his co-writer (and future second wife) Thea Von Harbou. Lang claimed Rosenthal shot herself, but others believe he pulled the trigger.

Von Harbou gave Lang an alibi, so he was never convicted, and Lang had Rosenthal buried immediately. The incident was expunged from the Berlin Police's records. If Lang did it, he got away with it, but for the rest of his life he made films about guilt, atonement and murder: to the suspicious it looked like he had something on his mind...

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THE CULTURE OF SCANDAL

Author David Allen Kizer spills the beans on Tinseltown's dark underbelly

Why was early Hollywood so scandalous?

The war was over; it was a new age for Hollywood and America. Fashion brought sex out in the open for the first time (think how much dress styles altered in just a few years between the WWI era and the jazz age); and the booze people drank during Prohibition was usually pure alcohol, which tends to reduce people to their base instincts and was available everywhere in Hollywood.

Did the movies just attract strange people?

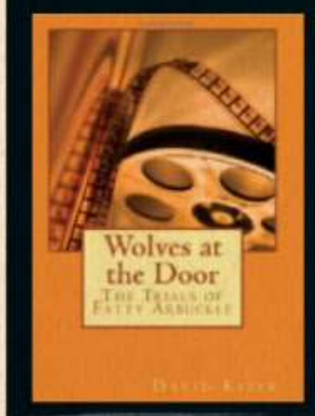
The industry was relatively new and it was easier for someone of almost any background to get into the pictures. This, of course, increased the likelihood that a sociopath or two would be working in your community!

Was the culture harder on women than men?

In an industry completely controlled by men with no civil rights laws or Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, women were objects to be preyed upon for sex. Thus the 'casting couch' had its humble beginnings.

Did the huge amounts of money make everyone crazy?

Many if not most of the stars, including Chaplin, Arbuckle and Normand, were all born dirt poor and suddenly had access to more money than a small country. With money comes a sense of entitlement. They were protected by their studios as investments and naturally felt they were untouchable. We want stars to be who we think they are, but the truth, then and now, is they're just like us. They're just better at pretending.



Kizer is the author of *Wolves At The Door: The Trials Of Fatty Arbuckle.*

The movie industry was inhabited by more than a few shady characters

THE MOBSTER MOGUL!

How the Mafia grabbed a hold of Hollywood

John 'Handsome Johnny' Roselli was a Chicago Mafia mobster. His nickname reflected his charm, sense of style and dashing good looks, all of which took him a long way in Hollywood. But he was also a killer and a racketeer who committed his first murder in 1922, aged just 17.

He moved west to Hollywood in 1924 to oversee the mob's racing interests and investigate the extortion of the movie studios. Becoming a friend of several stars, and seducing actresses Lana Turner, Betty Hutton and Donna Reed, he was able to impress Al Capone and Frank Nitti when he hosted them in LA three years later, and a plan was hatched to exploit the trade union the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, to place their own people in positions of power. The scheme was to threaten studios with union strikes for protection money. It was successful: the big four studios, 20th Century Fox, Warner Bros, MGM and Paramount Pictures each paid $50,000 to avoid walk-outs.

"THE SCHEME WAS TO THREATEN STUDIOS WITH UNION STRIKES IF THEY DIDN'T PAY PROTECTION MONEY"

Roselli's hi-jinks were interrupted in 1943 when he was jailed for three years for labour racketeering. On his release, however, he got right back into the action, arranging murders and acting as a pimp for stars like Frank Sinatra. The crooner's friendships with mobsters are legendary, and rumour has it that he owed his Oscar-winning role in *From Here To Eternity* to Roselli's heavy leaning on Columbia studio boss Harry Cohn. Roselli strong-armed Cohn again when he secured Marilyn Monroe a lucrative multi-year contract. Cohn had gained control of Columbia with mob funds, so it really was an offer he couldn't refuse!

Roselli was even an official movie producer for a time, thanks to a beautiful friendship with Bryan Foy of the British film company Eagle Lion Studios. Unsurprisingly, he worked on crime and gangster pictures like *T-Men* (1947) and *He Walked By Night* (1948), which inspired the popular TV series *Dragnet*. He ended his involvement in Eagle Lion in 1950, however, and five years later had completely tired of Hollywood and shifted his attention to Las Vegas. He was murdered in 1976, where his body was found in a steel petrol drum floating in Dumfoundling Bay in Florida.

DID FATTY KILL VIRGINIA RAPPE?

The three trials of silent star Roscoe Arbuckle

Rappe was an actress who worked mostly in small film roles

Roscoe 'Fatty' Arbuckle was one of the biggest stars of the 1910s, working at the famous Keystone studio (home of the slapstick *Keystone Cops*) with the likes of Harold Lloyd, Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton. But even though he was eventually acquitted, the terrible death of Virginia Rappe killed his career.

In reality, Arbuckle was shy with the ladies, to the extent that he was known around Hollywood as "the most chaste man in pictures." However, after Rappe's death at a hotel party in San Francisco, the sensationalist media branded him a sexually rapacious monster who used his immense weight to overpower helpless women. Rappe suffered from chronic cystitis, which flared up when she drank. She was taken ill at the party and died the next day of peritonitis from a ruptured bladder. Her friend Bambina Maude Delmont, in an attempt to extort money from Arbuckle's lawyers, told the police that Arbuckle had raped and crushed Rappe. The story of his rubbing ice on Rappe's stomach to relieve her pain quickly devolved like a Chinese whisper into his assaulting her with a bottle.

Arbuckle's fame was such that a fair trial was almost impossible. Two trials collapsed while his films were banned and the press went crazy with stories of debauched Hollywood orgies and substance abuse. After over a year, Arbuckle was finally declared innocent at his third trial, with the jury even writing him a formal letter of apology for his ordeal. But Fatty's career never recovered. He descended into alcoholism and died from a heart attack aged just 46, in 1933.

JFK'S SECRET TRYSTS WITH MARILYN!

As the actress said to the president...

Rumours of an affair between John F Kennedy and movie starlet Marilyn Monroe have kept the gossip columns slavering for decades. The dalliance has never been verified, but it seems fairly clear that his playboy antics didn't end when he married Jackie Onassis.

Monroe's famously breathy rendition of *Happy Birthday*, sung for Kennedy at Madison Square Garden in 1962 is supposedly what kicked their affair into high gear. They were formally introduced at a party later the same evening, when all onlookers agreed that there was clear mutual attraction.

The pair's affair was, obviously enough, conducted as secretly as possible. On one occasion they were entertained at the reclusive millionaire Howard Hughes' log cabin retreat in Nevada: a place that Hughes used to turn into a raucous off-the-radar brothel and gambling den whenever his wife was away. But a final tryst at Bing Crosby's villa in Palm Springs was to be their last. The president allegedly told her she wasn't "first lady material."

© Getty Images

THE SHORT, VIOLENT LIFE OF MABEL NORMAND!

The silent star's numerous shooting scandals

One of Charlie Chaplin's most frequent leading ladies in the 1910s, Mabel Normand was a significant star in her own right: Chaplin first played his famous tramp character in Normand's own star vehicle *Mabel's Strange Predicament*. By 1918 she was earning an astronomical $3,500 a week and had her own studio in Culver City. While she was never exactly implicated in any crimes, violence had a strange habit of erupting around her.

The first incident was the murder of actor and director William Desmond Taylor in 1922. The crime was never solved, but the theory was that he had been rubbed out by Normand's cocaine dealer when he'd offered to help her straighten out and have her supplier arrested. The next was the mysterious shooting of oil baron Courtland S Dines by Normand's chauffeur, while Dines and Normand were having cocktails. The chauffeur claimed he'd thought Normand was in distress. Dines survived, but Normand's career didn't. She made her final film in 1927 and died three years later from tuberculosis.

Clara Bow was hounded by unscrupulous tabloids for years

SORDID SEX SHENANIGANS!

Orgiastic accusations hounded the original 'It Girl'

Clara Bow was a silent film star who rose to megastardom in the 1920s. Incredibly beautiful and charismatic, she was a top box-office draw who received 45,000 fan letters in a typical month. She was one of cinema's earliest sex symbols and her biggest hit was *It* (1927), named for the indefinable smouldering quality she brought to the screen. The phrase 'It Girl' that we still use today to describe beautiful female celebrities stems from there. Bow was the very first.

Like Fatty Arbuckle, however, her career was destroyed by allegations of jealous detractors aiming to make a buck from salacious stories about her. She first hit trouble when her personal secretary Daisy Devoe tried to blackmail her by threatening to take seedy stories to the press. Bow called Devoe's bluff and pressed charges against Devoe for financial mismanagement, but the subsequent trial brought Bow all the wrong publicity, and she was tarred and feathered as a woman of drunken loose morals.

Bow came close to a nervous breakdown, dubbed "Crisis-A-Day Clara" by her own manager, but her problems didn't end with Devoe. Smelling blood in the water, the tabloid publication *Coast Reporter* began running ever-more unbelievable stories about Bow's debauchery, running article after article in which they accused her of such varied activities as enthusiastic drug abuse, sex with men, women and animals, orgies, sex in public, exhibitionism, spreading venereal disease, incest, and even sex with the entire USC football team!

The magazine's publisher was eventually jailed for trying to blackmail Bow, having offered to stop printing the stories in exchange for $25,000, but she never shook off the tarnished image. She retired from filmmaking completely in 1933 to lead a reclusive and troubled life. She attempted suicide in 1944, was diagnosed schizophrenic in 1949 and died in 1965 of a heart attack, then almost completely faded from fame.

HISTORY VS HOLLYWOOD

Fact versus fiction on the silver screen

LAWRENCE OF ARABIA

It may have swept the board at the 1963 Oscars, but how many awards will it win for historical accuracy?

Director: David Lean **Starring:** Peter O'Toole, Alec Guinness, Anthony Quinn **Country of origin:** Canada **Year made:** 1962

WHAT THEY GOT WRONG...

01 In the foreground of the Akaba raid scene, the Turkish Army are clearly shown using a Browning M1919 machine gun, which wasn't yet designed and therefore would not have been available.

02 When we first see General Allenby, he wears Overseas Service Chevrons on his lower right sleeve. These were only introduced in very late 1917, several months after the period being depicted.

03 In the movie, Farraj is mortally wounded by a detonator going off in his clothes, but in his book *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, T.E. Lawrence writes that Farraj was wounded by a Turk shooting him.

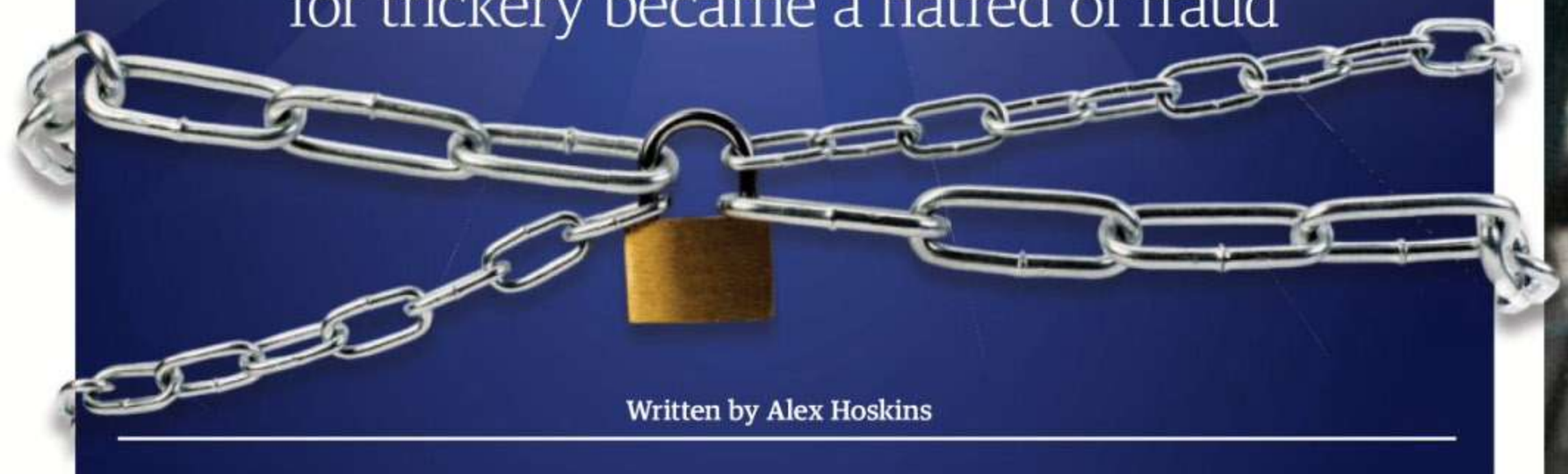
04 The idea that Lawrence's Arab army almost entirely deserted him as he moved further north, as shown over the second half of the film, is inaccurate. According to records, only one or two Arabs actually deserted.

05 It is implied in the early scenes of the film with Colonel Brighton and Prince Feisal that the major sea port Yanbu is fifty miles south of Wadi Safra, when in reality it is approximately five miles west of it.

© Alamy

HOUDINI'S FINAL TRICK

Houdini was the world's greatest illusionist, but when he suffered a tragic loss, his love for trickery became a hatred of fraud



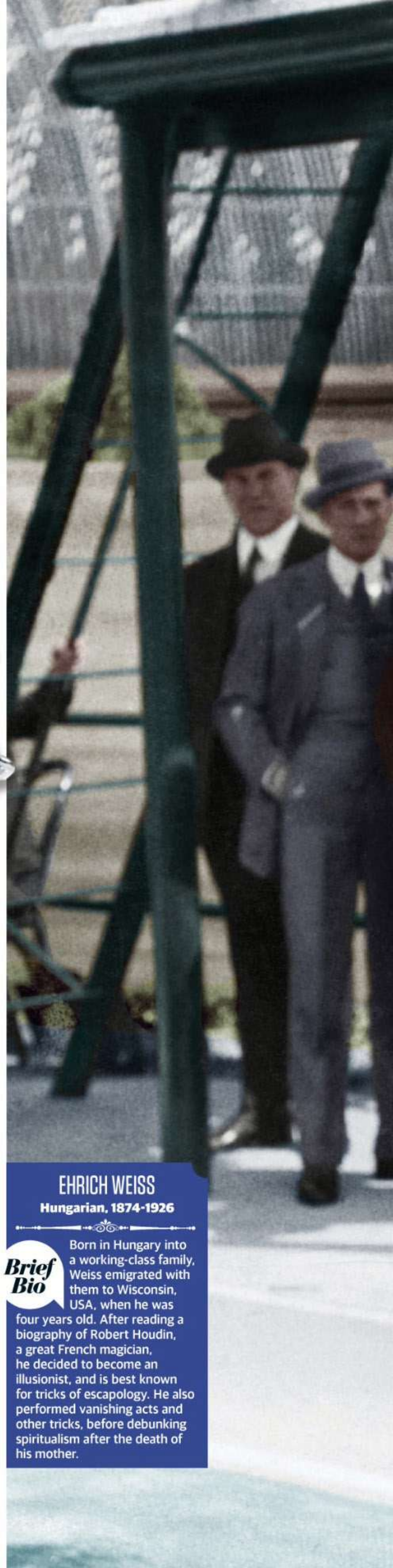
Written by Alex Hoskins

It's 1923. Those gathered around the table at the séance are enraptured by the wonder of what unfolds before their eyes. The medium at the head of the table is producing what looks like an otherworldly ectoplasm from their mouth, while objects are flying around the room. Any gathered there who didn't believe in spirits beyond the grave before certainly do now. There is one man at the table, however, who doesn't seem as surprised as everyone else. In fact, he looks strangely familiar. Suddenly, the man leaps from his chair and takes off a rubber nose and wig, bellowing "I am Houdini. And you are a fraud!"

Ehrich Weiss, better known as Harry Houdini, could confound audiences with death-defying acts of escapology, magic and mystery. Yet in his later career, he became obsessed with debunking spiritualists, appalled by the way in which they fooled the general public and made a mockery of grief. That wasn't the magic he knew and loved, and in his crusade, he gained a reputation for a special brand of scepticism. He was an instrumental member of a 'debunking team' for *Scientific American* magazine, and would attend thousands of séances throughout his lifetime, in order to truly understand the methods used by tricksters. In the end, it would all but take over from his previous magic career. Houdini became increasingly consumed with the idea of busting myths, until his untimely and, some would say, suspicious death.

Spiritualism was at its peak during Houdini's lifetime, but it started to gain momentum much earlier. The landmark case that, for some, gave spiritualism credibility involved the Fox sisters in Hydesville, New York, 1848. Upon moving into a new family home, a knocking sound could often be heard coming from within the walls and fixtures of the building. As time went on and the knocking continued, the sisters created a sort of 'communication' with the knocking noises, whereby they would make noises, and hear replies in the form of knocks from the walls. On investigating the history of the house, they found that a local man had been buried in the house's basement, and the noises were believed to be his way of contacting the living from beyond the grave. The tale gripped America, and essentially formed the foundations of spiritualism as it was known in Houdini's time.

Years later, one of the sisters, Margaret Fox, admitted the stunt had been faked and confessed that she had battled with the guilt of deceiving the whole nation. Blaming the stunt on her youth and naivety, she called it "the greatest sorrow of [her] life". She retracted the confession later, but the truth of the story was largely irrelevant by that point. Spiritualism had set down its ghostly roots.



EHRICH WEISS

Hungarian, 1874-1926

Brief Bio

Born in Hungary into a working-class family, Weiss emigrated with them to Wisconsin, USA, when he was four years old. After reading a biography of Robert Houdin, a great French magician, he decided to become an illusionist, and is best known for tricks of escapology. He also performed vanishing acts and other tricks, before debunking spiritualism after the death of his mother.

"He became consumed with the idea of busting myths"

Houdini's Final Trick

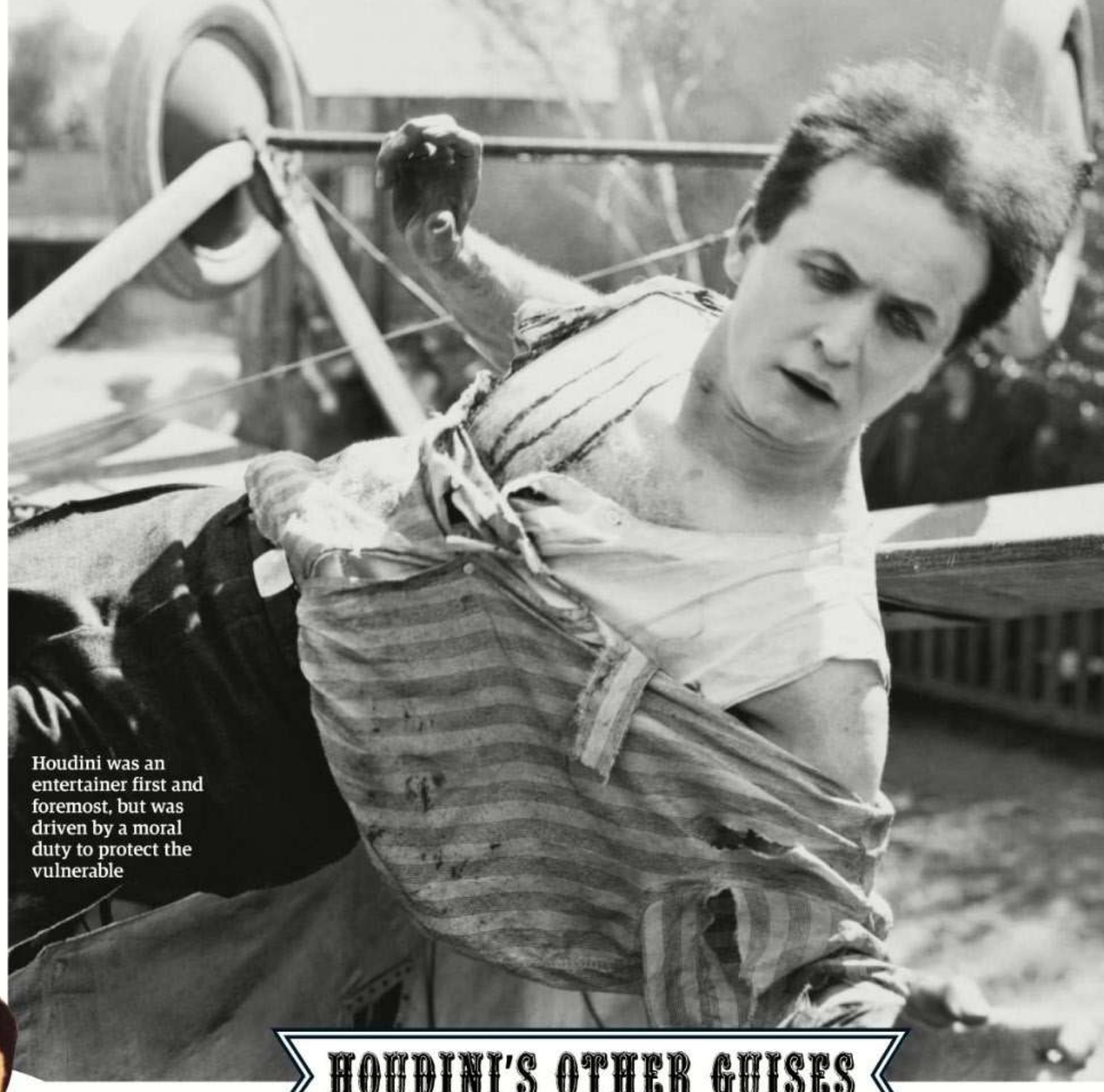
Spiritualism offered a social accessibility in a way that no other religions did, as women and those of lower social means were able to lead sessions, and even went on to become some of the country's most famed mediums. The phenomenon also tapped into the huge loss of life in the First World War, and part of its success may have been linked to a mass grief across the nations involved. Mediums would demonstrate their powers in various ways, ranging from freely moving tables and chairs and unexplained noises to the production of ethereal ectoplasm, from their mouths or genitals.

As a magician, Houdini was incredibly deft at recognising the tricks played by mediums - in his early career, he had even played some of them for audiences himself. At a show in Kansas, he had wowed audiences by recounting the name of a recently killed man in the town where he was performing. He had in fact just strolled around the town's cemetery, checked local birth and death records and spent time talking to local gossips. The information he revealed on stage was something every audience member knew, but the theatrical setting and apparent contact from the dead was too much for some to handle, and audience members fled the auditorium in fear.

When Houdini's mother, Cecilia Steiner Weiss, fell ill and died on 17 July 1913, he was devastated. The funeral was held back, against Jewish custom, so that he could see the body one last time, and he was largely thought to never have recovered from the grief of losing her.

Houdini and Cecilia had always been close; she had supported his

Houdini's fame garnered him several film roles



Houdini was an entertainer first and foremost, but was driven by a moral duty to protect the vulnerable

HOUDINI'S OTHER GUISES

Houdini wasn't just an illusionist - he tried out other jobs too

Film star

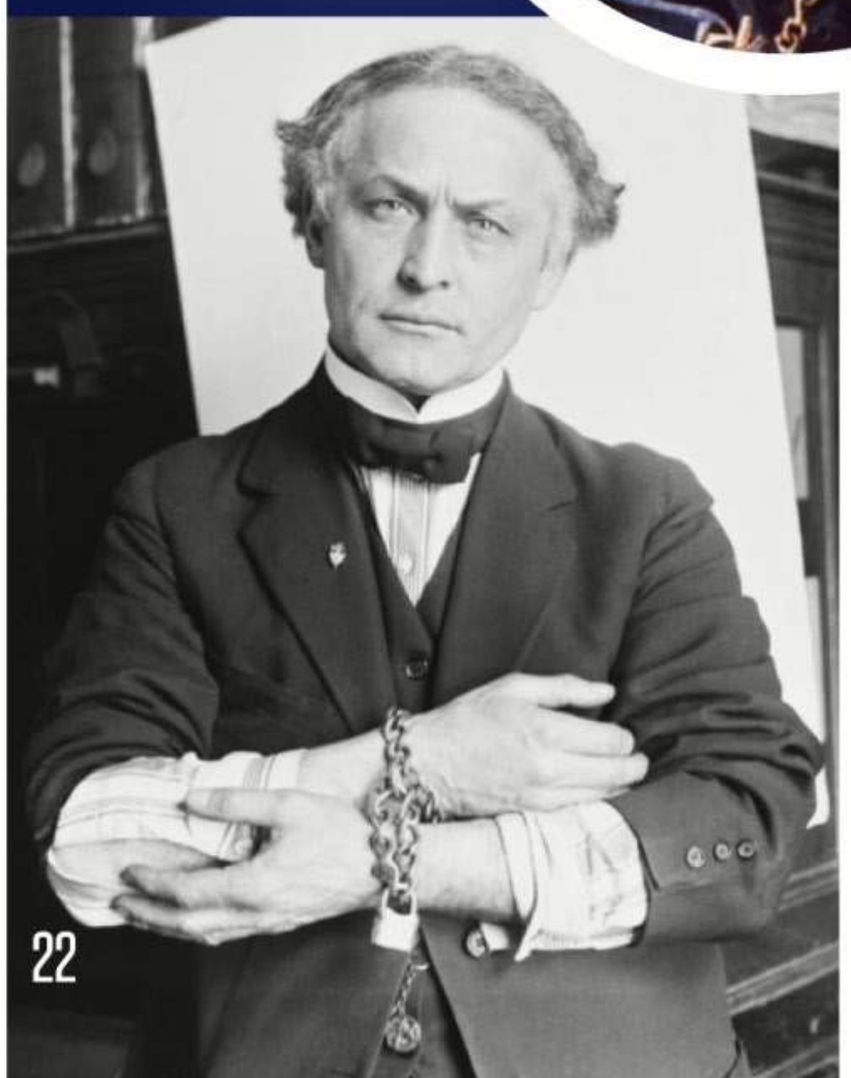
Houdini's film career began as a way to show his outdoor escapes as part of his stage show, but grew quickly. His first starring role was in a serial called *The Master Mystery* and from there followed films such as *The Grim Game*, *Terror Island*, *The Man From Beyond* and *Haldane Of The Secret Service*. Houdini's film success could never match up with his affection for magic, and in 1923, he bowed out of the movie business altogether.

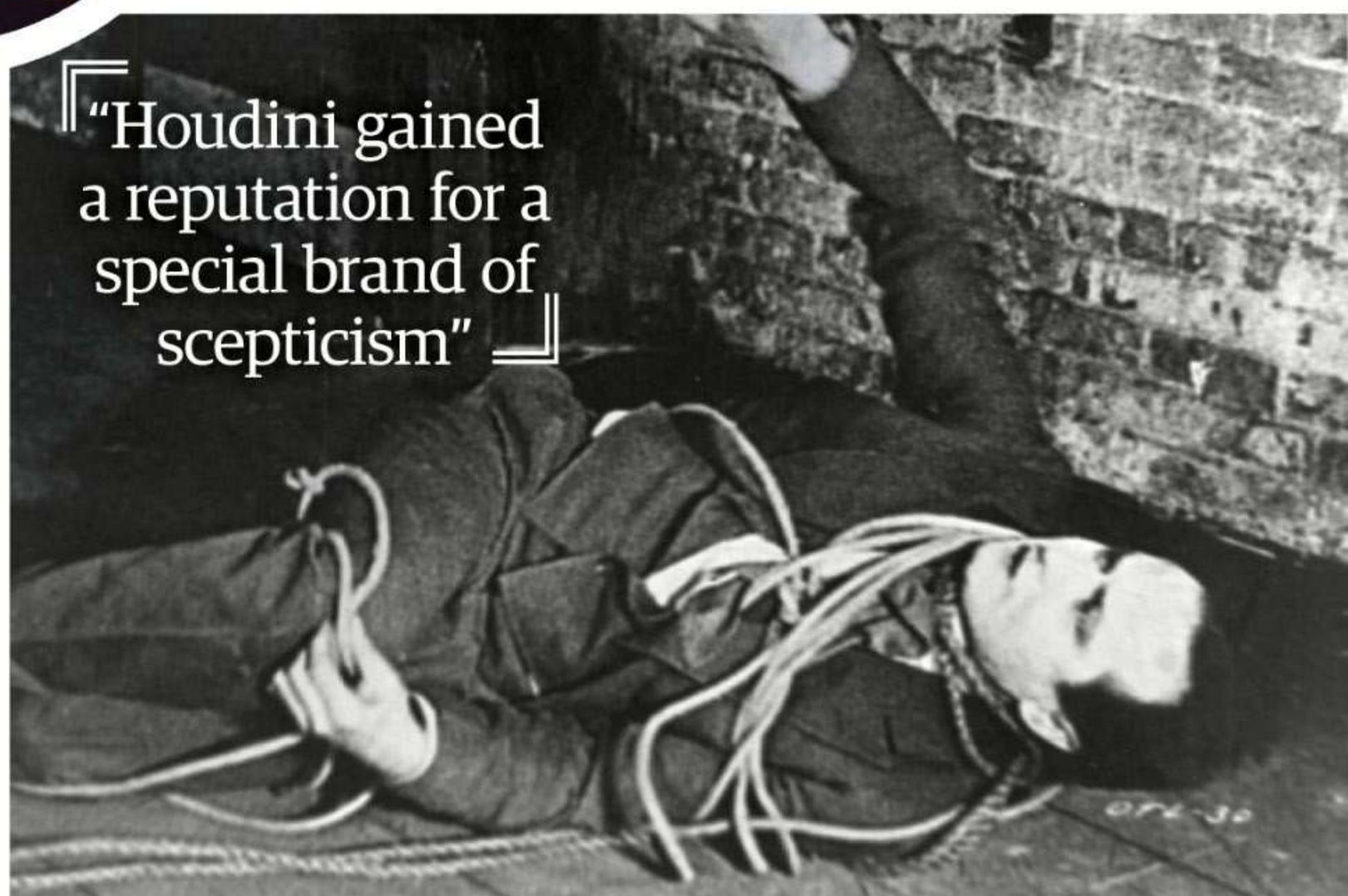
Spy

In 2006, the book *The Secret Life Of Houdini* claimed Houdini was a spy for Britain and the US in WWI. Houdini could speak German, which would have been essential, and authors William Kalush and Harry Sloman argued Houdini spied on political leaders and royalty, using his career as a cover. The link was made when they found a diary written by William Melville, a British spymaster, which mentioned Houdini.

Aviator

Just after 1900, Houdini was gripped by a fascination with flight, and purchased a French biplane in 1909. He became a competent pilot and flew around Australia, intending to be the first person in the country to do so. It came to light that a Mr Defries from London had already pipped him to the post three months before, and never one to do things by halves, Houdini didn't fly his plane again.

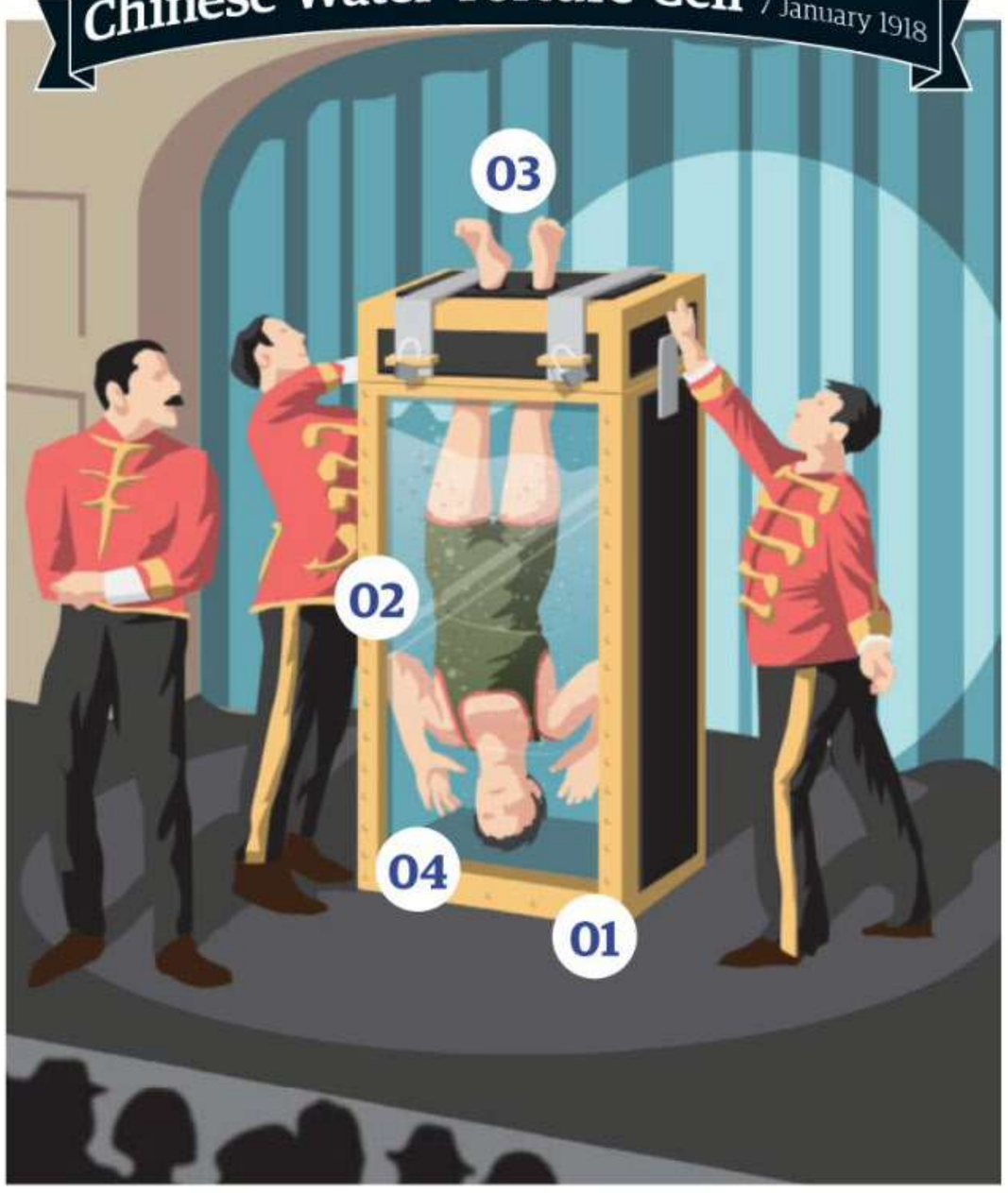




"Houdini gained a reputation for a special brand of scepticism"

THE GREAT HOUDINI'S GREATEST TRICKS

Chinese Water Torture Cell 7 January 1918



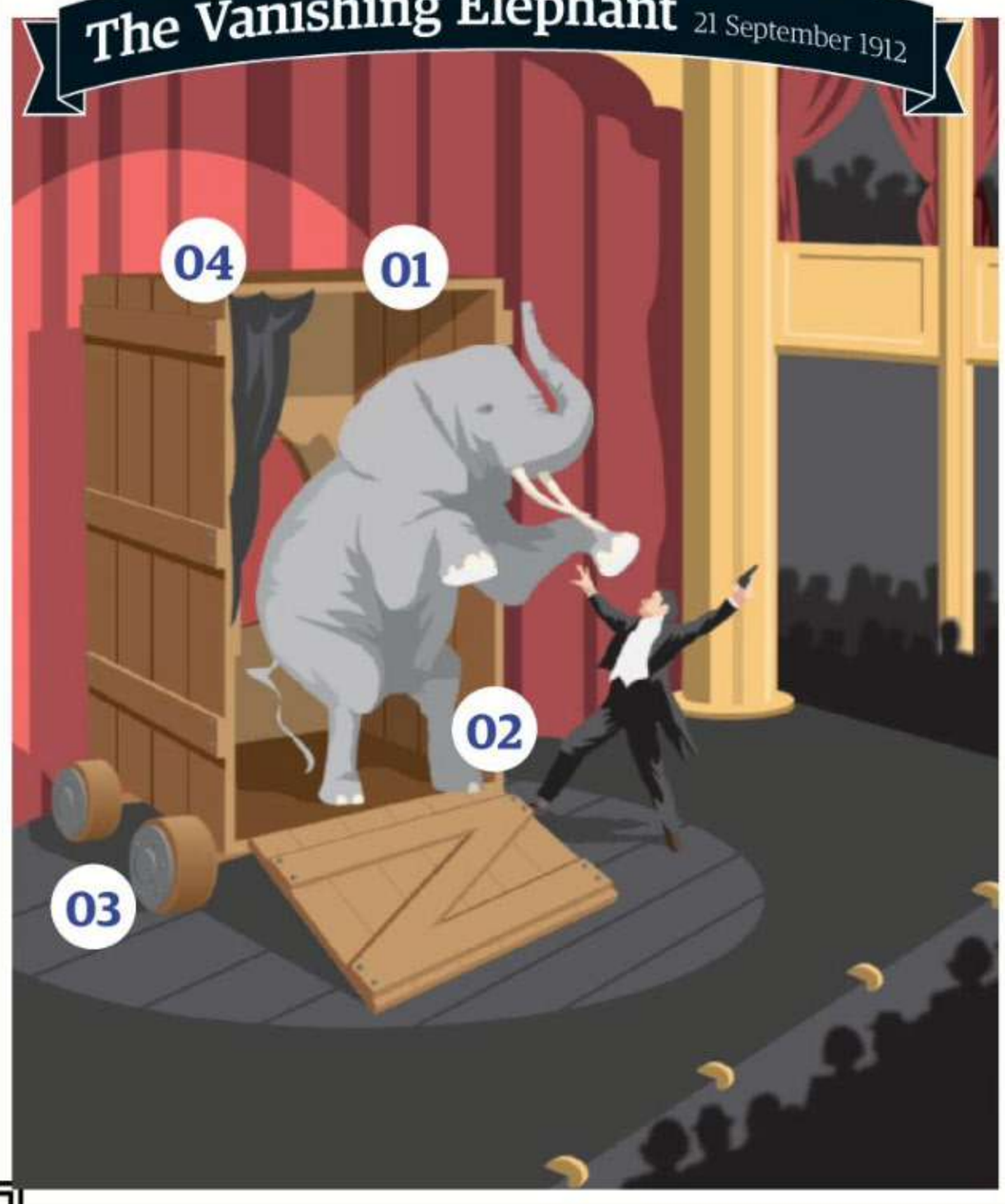
01 The cell was made of mahogany, metal and glass, so that a submerged Houdini could be seen. However, for the escape itself, a curtain was drawn across the cell.

02 The cell would be filled with water on stage as Houdini drew attention to the various inescapable features of the cell, then went off-stage to change into a bathing suit.

03 Houdini was strapped into ankle stocks attached to the top frame of the box. He was then hoisted, head first, into the cell. Water spilled over the sides creating more air space, and a curtain covered the tank for the escape.

04 Houdini would use the bars to help himself up to the top of the cell, free his feet from the stocks and climb out from the cell.

The Vanishing Elephant 21 September 1912

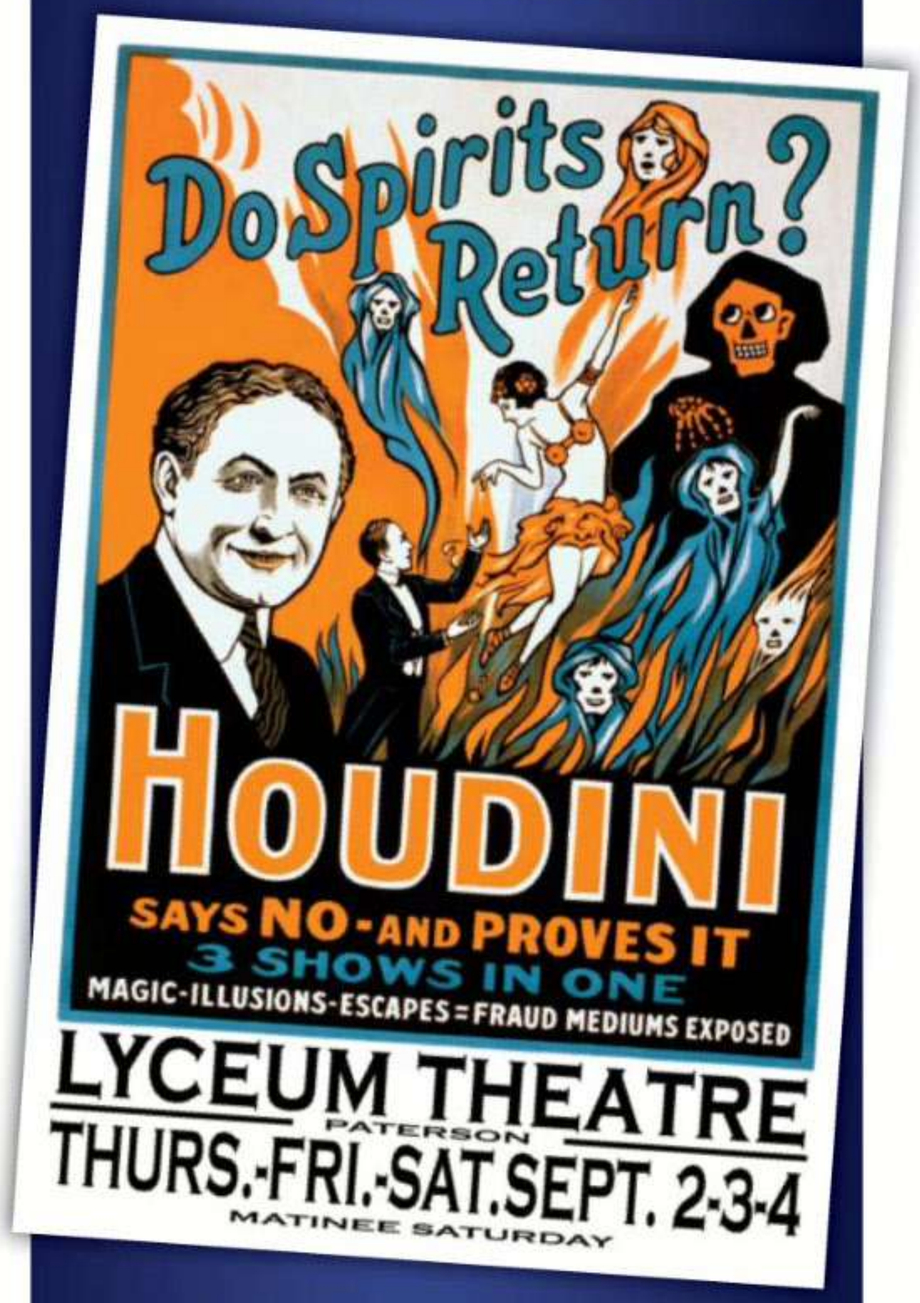


01 Houdini would describe the large box on stage as being "around eight feet [2.4 metres] high", but it was actually much larger. The huge theatre made the box look small in comparison.

02 Houdini fed the elephant and led her into the box, then closed the front curtains of the box.

03 A team of 12 men were tasked with moving the box around, while the trainer, who was inside with the elephant, moved her to one side.

04 A black curtain matching the inside of the box was drawn over the interior, hiding the elephant. The circle cut into the back of the box allowed in enough light to mask the darkness in the box and the front curtain was bunched to one side of the box to ensure the elephant was hidden.



ambitions to become a magician from early in his life, and after her death, Houdini sought help from mediums in the hope of contacting her again. But at every attempt, Houdini was unconvinced by the attempts of the spiritualists he knew to be charlatans. It was this disappointment at not being able to speak to his mother again that fuelled his anger against spiritualism into something approaching an obsession.

With each trip to a séance or medium, his fervour against their trickery grew, so eventually, he began attending the events in order to work out how tricks were done, rather than in the hope of being convinced. He began to argue in public forums that mediumship was a particularly indecent type of fraud. Houdini chose to wage war not just in person, by attending séances and revealing frauds in small groups, but also through newspapers and books. His writing was always mysterious and often pompous, self-aggrandising and arrogant, and invited plenty of detractors, but also struck a nerve. Just as the temptation to discover how a trick is performed is strong, so the excitement of discovering the methods behind mediumship gripped the public.

Houdini worked with many writers and thinkers to get his message to the masses. His book *A Magician Among The Spirits* was co-written by CM Eddy Jr, and later he commissioned a book to be written by H.P. Lovecraft on the fundamental problems of spiritualism. He also began to tour with talks discrediting the methods of the mediums, where he would show slides of famous mediums and systematically denounce their supposed beliefs. It seemed he was just as entertaining a cynic as he was a magician.

Naturally, a nation largely convinced by the efforts of spiritualists was not entirely happy

THE STRANGE CASE OF MINA CRANDON

Who was Mina Crandon?

Mina was a prominent Boston socialite who gained a reputation as a psychic, going by the name 'Margery' in the 1920s. She was married to Dr Le Roi Goddard Crandon, a local surgeon, in 1918. She started to experiment with spiritualism as a pastime, and displayed a seemingly natural ability to communicate with the dead.

How did she create the illusion of spiritualism?

'Margery' dressed in skimpy clothing, in order to give the impression of openness and an inability to conceal objects. One of her most famous tricks was the production of a sinewy 'spirit hand', supposedly belonging to her brother, Walter Stinson. She would also kick objects and was often helped by those attending her sessions.

How did she know Houdini?

Mina's performance as Margery had gained notoriety after gaining support from people like Conan Doyle. Houdini attended her séance in 1924 when she had convinced the other panellists for *Scientific American* of her abilities, as he wanted to make up his own mind about her.

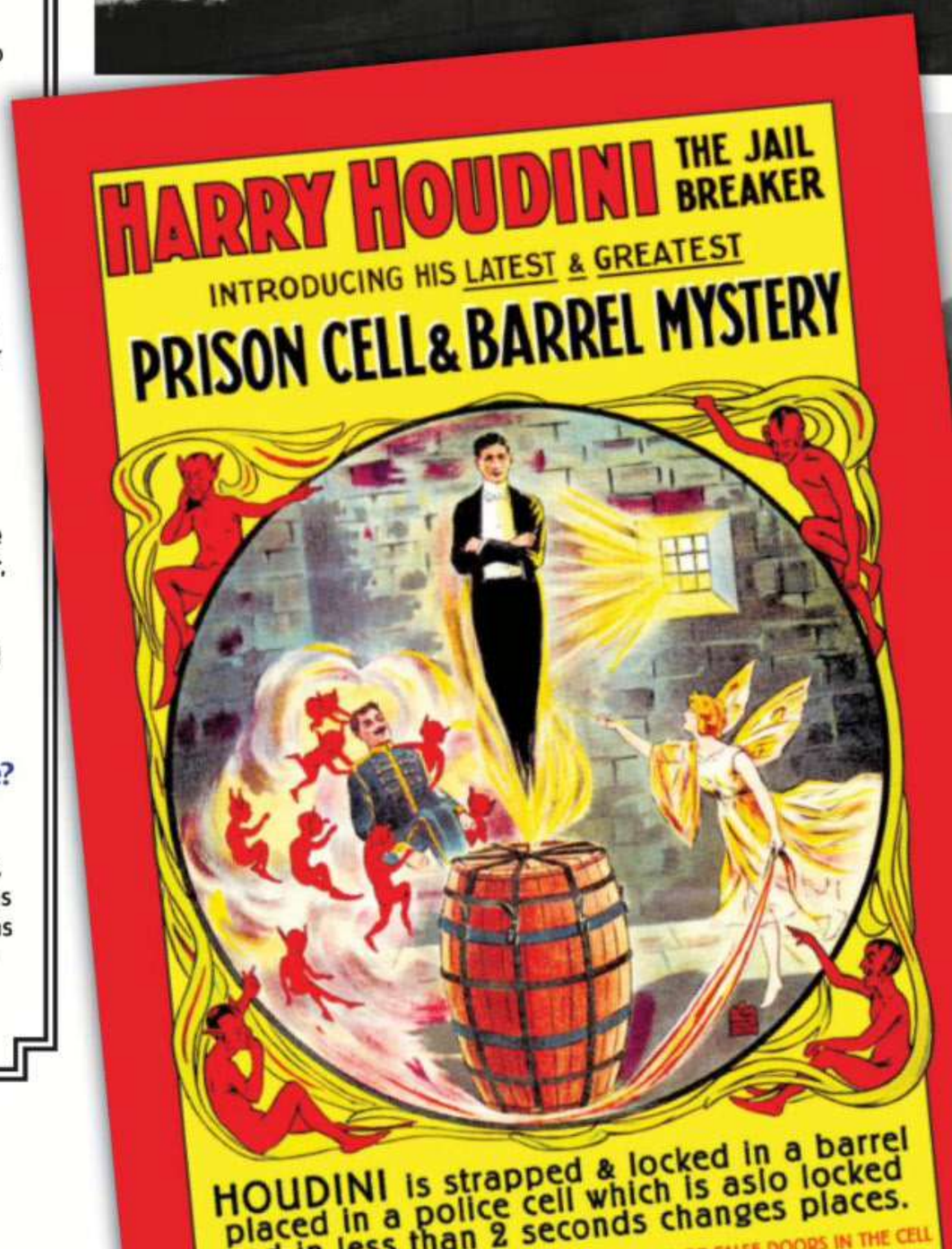
What happened?

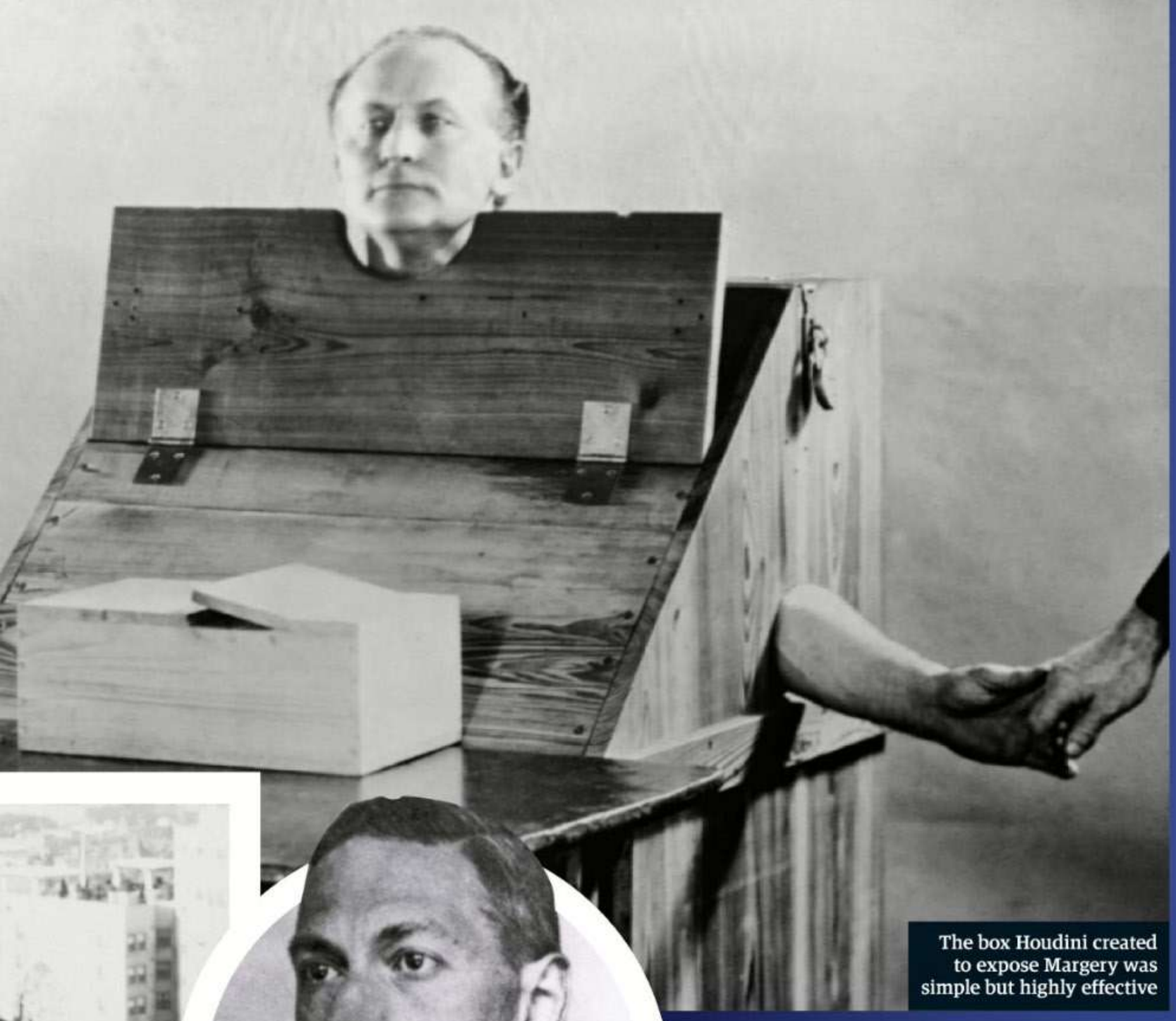
On 23 July 1924, Houdini arrived at the Crandon's Lime Street house in Boston. Here he witnessed her take on the voice of Walter, who communicated directly with Houdini through Margery, asking where he should throw objects. Houdini claimed he could feel her movements and would expose her with one more session.

Did Mina Crandon want revenge?

Mina continued to perform as Margery and even added new tricks to her sessions. Margery's supporters rallied against Houdini, and Walter the spirit guide made many claims about Houdini, including one in 1926 that was too close for comfort: "Houdini will be gone by Halloween."

The gruesome 'spirit hand' of Mina Crandon, which was made from discarded animal liver


HARRY HOUDINI THE JAIL BREAKER
INTRODUCING HIS LATEST & GREATEST
PRISON CELL & BARREL MYSTERY
HOUDINI is strapped & locked in a barrel placed in a police cell which is aslo locked and in less than 2 seconds changes places.



The box Houdini created to expose Margery was simple but highly effective

THE CANCER OF SUPERSTITION

In 1926, Houdini commissioned the eminent science-fiction writer H. P. Lovecraft to write a book denouncing spiritualism once and for all. Lovecraft and Houdini had already worked together on various projects, including a semi-fictional short story, *Imprisoned With The Pharaohs*, but the new commission, *The Cancer Of Superstition*, was to be a rational, scientific book, investigating why spiritualism was such a widespread phenomenon. However, Houdini and Lovecraft would never see their revolutionary tome published – Houdini's sudden death on 31 October 1926 put paid to the project.

Bess halted all work on it following Houdini's death, and a detailed synopsis is all that remains of the book. According to the surviving plan, the book would have consisted of chapters explaining the "harmful effects of superstition" and examining its roots in "man's effort to assign causes for the natural phenomena around him." Exactly why Bess halted the project we will never know. Some think it was too much to handle with the grief of her husband's death, but it has been suggested that she still harboured a belief in spiritualism.

with Houdini's attempts to dismantle the phenomenon. One of his most famous adversaries was in fact a former friend, the Sherlock Holmes author Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. The two had met in 1920 and had a mutual respect for one another, despite beliefs at opposite ends of the spiritualist spectrum.

The similarities between the two men are undeniable; both were intelligent and in prominent positions, and Conan Doyle, like Houdini, had lost loved ones. However, perhaps due to a lack of knowledge of magic methods that set Houdini apart, Conan Doyle had been thoroughly convinced by his trips to mediums and forays into the world of the supernatural. In fact, Conan Doyle was a prime example of the grieving relative taken advantage of that so infuriated Houdini, and it was for their sake as well as his own that his campaign raged on.

Houdini's ghost-busting campaign wasn't one that Conan Doyle appreciated, though. He believed Houdini to be a psychic of great talent, despite his protestations, and invited him on several occasions to see mediums he felt could convince Houdini of the movement's authenticity. On one occasion, Conan Doyle invited Houdini to his home for a séance led by his wife, Lady Jean, and Houdini accepted, trusting his host's honesty and respectability. Houdini became even more enthused by the thought as Jean declared that she would attempt to contact his mother, something he, despite his rational mind, still hoped might be possible. The séance started well, with Jean relaying a loving message from Cecilia, through the method of 'automatic writing.' The message read, "Oh my darling, thank God, thank God, at last I'm through. I've tried, oh so often – now I am happy. Why, of course, I want to talk to my boy – my own beloved boy – friends, thank you, with all my heart for this"

> "Houdini was crushed, and months later publicly exposed the séance as fraudulent"

Houdini would certainly have been happy with such a message, were it not for two instrumental details. Cecilia only ever spoke broken English, and she never learned to write. Houdini was crushed, but hid his disappointment until months later when he publicly exposed the séance as fraudulent. He maintained he did not blame the Conan Doyles, but believed them to have been swept away with their own beliefs.

The relationship between the two was strained after the encounter and they publicly came to blows over the medium Mina Crandon, who Conan Doyle believed to be a gifted spiritualist, but whom Houdini exposed as a fraud in a high-profile case for *Scientific American*. They had offered a prize of $2,500 to any medium who could convince the panel, on which Houdini sat, that they were genuinely able to channel spirits. When Houdini heard that Mina, who performed under the name 'Margery', had convinced every other member of the panel of her authenticity, he immediately cancelled upcoming shows and headed to Boston to give his judgement. On 23 July 1924, Houdini sat in a séance with Margery, her husband and some believers, attempting to work out her methods. He sat on Margery's left and had worn a tight bandage on his right leg all day so that he could feel any movement, no matter how slight. By the end of the séance he felt he had her worked out, but would need to attend one more session to truly expose her methods.

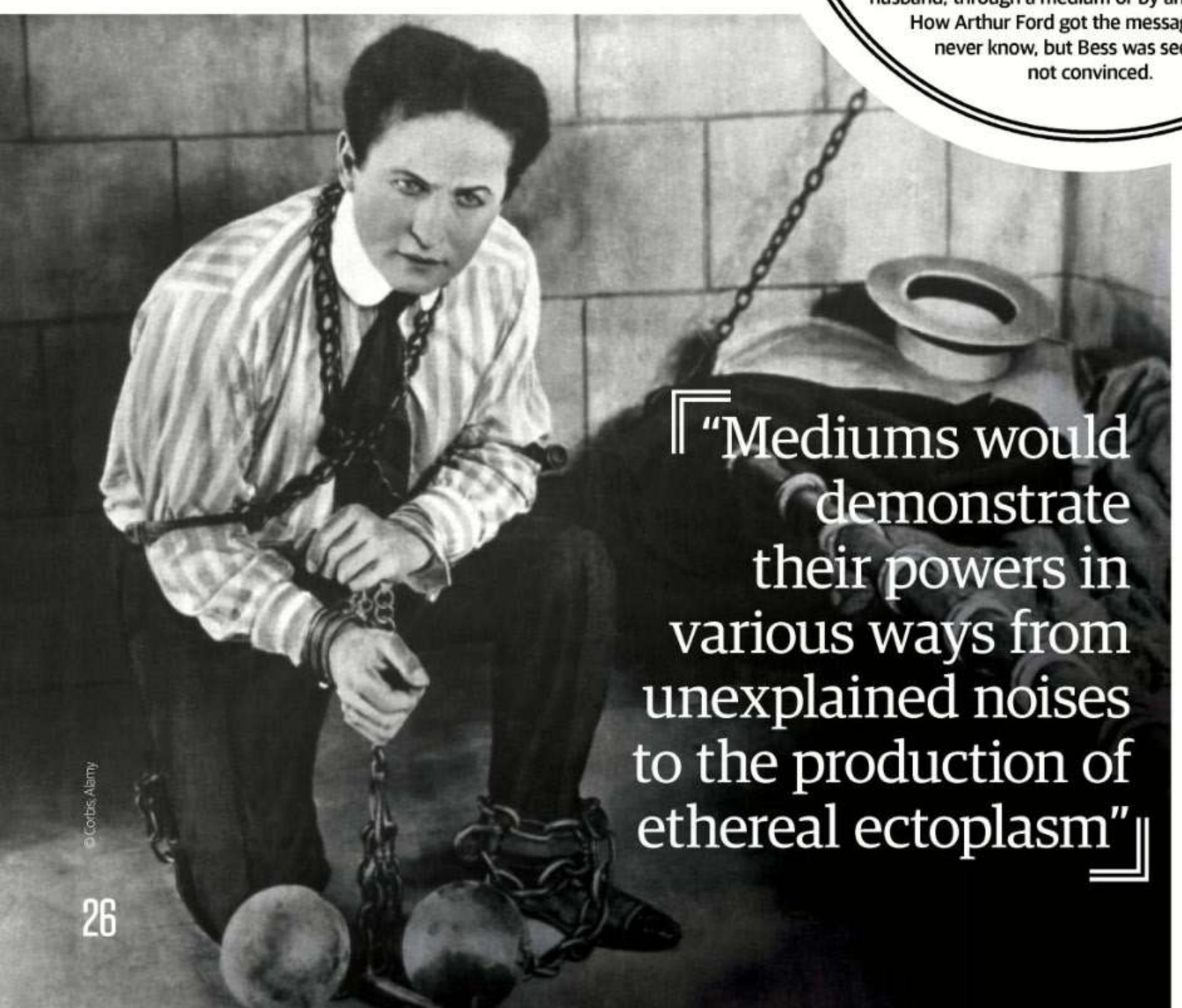
For his second séance with Margery, he had a special box constructed. The box would conceal Margery's legs, and constrain her arms and neck, so that her head poked out of the top of the apparatus. Without the ability to kick objects or

Houdini's widow Bess holding her last séance in Houdini's memory in 1936

"ROSABELLE BELIEVE"

The Houdinis never gave up they would one day be able to communicate from beyond the grave, and agreed on the phrase 'Rosabelle, believe' as a message to ensure they would know they were truly speaking to one another.

Every year after Houdini's death, Bess held séances and was almost convinced when one medium managed to transfer the very message she had been waiting for: 'Rosabelle, believe.' Arthur Ford, in 1929, communicated the message and afterward convinced Bess to sign a letter confirming his success. Five years later, Bess issued a letter of her own, stating in black and white that she had never been contacted by her husband, through a medium or by any other means. How Arthur Ford got the message we may never know, but Bess was seemingly not convinced.



© Corbis, Alamy

"Mediums would demonstrate their powers in various ways from unexplained noises to the production of ethereal ectoplasm"

the help of her husband, Margery was exposed as a fraud. Conan Doyle refused to accept the outcome, but Mina Crandon did not receive the $2,500 prize, and the case has remained as one of Houdini's greatest triumphs.

In October 1926, two young men entered the dressing room of the Princess Theatre, Montreal, where Houdini sat preparing for his show. They had come, they said, to see whether it was true that Houdini could take a blow to the stomach as had been reported. He replied that he could, if given time to prepare. No sooner had he said it than J Gordon Whitehead, one of the men, punched Houdini four times in the stomach.

The trauma to the stomach either led to or exacerbated a case of severe appendicitis, and the resulting acute peritonitis that killed Houdini, on 31 October – Halloween. The punch was the final event in a long list of unhappy accidents that took place while Houdini was touring with the anti-spiritualism show, including his wife Bess falling ill with ptomaine poisoning, and a chain slipping in the Water Torture Cell trick, leading to a fractured ankle for Houdini. Questions remain over whether this spate of bad luck, ending in Houdini's death at the age of 52, was pure bad luck, or something more sinister. He had, after all, made plenty of enemies through his debunking campaign.

Despite his crusade against mediums, Harry and Bess always had an agreement that if he was able to reach her from beyond the grave, he would. A year after his death, on Halloween, 1927, Bess invited some of the most famous spiritualists of the time to conduct the first of what would be an annual séance in hope of contacting Houdini.

Many mediums over the years attempted to convince Bess that they had made contact with Houdini's spirit, but even the most convincing was discovered to be fraudulent.

That someone who so vehemently opposed to spiritualism would still hold on to a shadow of doubt, and that his wife was clearly as eager as those Houdini sought to protect to communicate with the dead is a fascinating twist in the tale. To this day, annual séances are held by fans in the hope of receiving word from Houdini on whether communication is possible and what we can expect after death. Despite the fierce opposition to spiritualism he held on to throughout his life, Houdini always hoped in his heart that contact between the living and the dead was possible. Yet no matter how many times he tried, he could never make contact with the dead while he was alive, and has not yet found a way to make contact with the living in death. It was the mystery that consumed his later life and was the one trick that the Great Houdini could never pull off.

HISTORY VS HOLLYWOOD

Fact versus fiction on the silver screen

CLEOPATRA

Was this classic film as liberal with historical fact as it was with its budget?

Director: Joseph L Mankiewicz, Rouben Mamoulian, Darryl F Zanuck **Starring:** Elizabeth Taylor, Richard Burton **Country of origin:** UK, USA, Switzerland **Year:** 1963

WHAT THEY GOT WRONG...

01 Cleopatra commits suicide in Shakespearean fashion by clasping a snake to her breast until it bites her. But beside the fact that the snake used in the film was a harmless garden snake (not an Egyptian cobra), historians believe she was bitten on her arm or that she simply poisoned herself.

02 Cicero was shown to take an active role in Roman politics and play a major part in plotting the death of Caesar. But the real-life Cicero didn't enter the senate when Caesar was the de-facto emperor and played no active part in his assassination, although he did write a letter of support to one of Brutus's supporters.

03 Despite the film being set in the last century BCE, the décor used is from a mixture of different reigns from many different Egyptian kings and queens. This includes Queen Hetepheres, who actually lived around 2,600 years before Cleopatra ruled this illustrious ancient civilisation.

04 The film largely ignores the militaria of Caesar's period in favour of the armour and shields that were used a century later. Centurions weren't acknowledged either – not a single soldier in the Oscar-winning movie has a crest indicating their rank, and there were many in Caesar's army.

05 Although the Arch of Constantine shown in the film's opening sequence was authentically and painstakingly replicated, history doesn't place the Arch in the Forum at all, aside from the not-so-trivial fact that it wasn't built until a full 350 years after Cleopatra entered Rome.

What they got right

The makers of the film on the whole did try to follow the history of the period closely. It correctly portrays that Cleopatra VII of Egypt did indeed have a son with Caesar in 47 BCE, named Ptolemy Caesar and the child was nicknamed Caesarion.

© Alamy

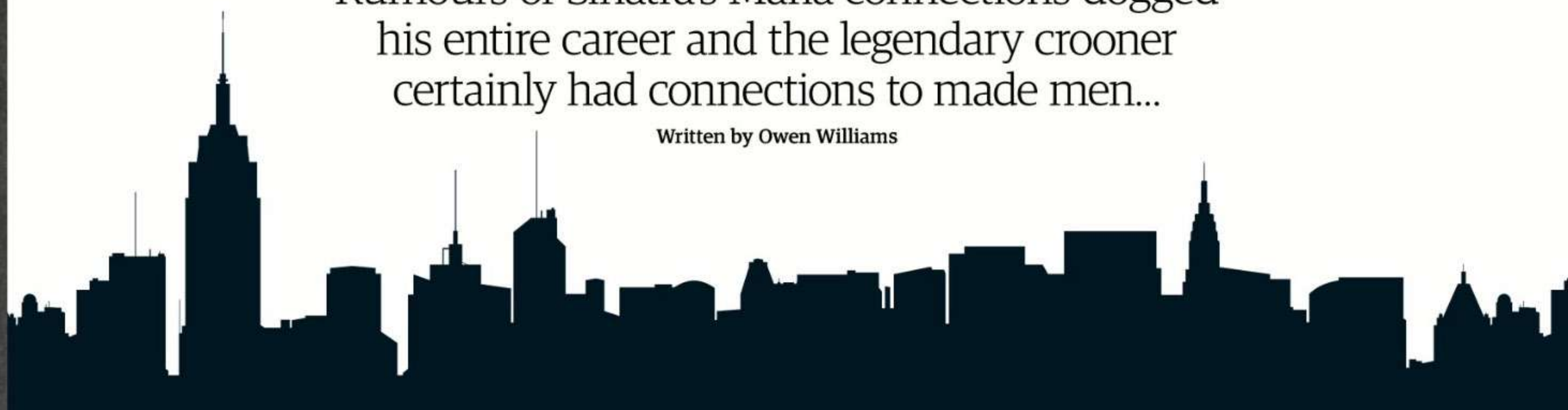
During his peak years, Frank Sinatra was one of the biggest entertainment stars in the world

My Way

Frank Sinatra's Dark Side

Rumours of Sinatra's Mafia connections dogged his entire career and the legendary crooner certainly had connections to made men...

Written by Owen Williams



In 1950 the US Senate convened a high-profile committee to investigate the growing problem of organised crime in America. Popularly known as the Kefauver Committee, after its chairman Senator Estes Kefauver, its findings included admissions of the FBI's failure to combat countrywide mob activity, leading to more than 70 local 'crime commissions' to combat the Mafia at local level, and a nationwide Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organisations Act. Unusually for the time, the proceedings were televised, with more than 30 million viewers eagerly tuning in to watch the testimonies of infamous gangsters: Mickey Cohen, Frank Costello, Jake 'Greasy Thumb' Guzik and others. Narrowly escaping a public grilling on this occasion was a struggling club singer called Frank Sinatra.

Council Joseph L Nellis questioned the singer in advance to determine his suitability for the stand, and the Kefauver Committee ultimately decided that no real purpose would be served by a Sinatra subpoena: his career was ailing at the time and the Committee generously opted not to finish him off by tarring him with the Mafia brush. However, during his questioning Sinatra nevertheless admitted to more than passing acquaintances with a significant list of made men: Lucky Luciano, Bugsy Siegel, Willie Moretti and Al Capone's cousins, The Fischetti Brothers.

Sinatra would not escape similar hearings in the future. While he always denied any Mafia involvement, his name kept cropping up. He was called before a Joint Senate-House Select Committee on Crime – along with his fellow Rat Pack performer Sammy Davis Jr – investigating gambling and corruption related to sport, in 1972. There was further public testimony, and further denials, in the hearings of the Nevada Gaming Control Board in 1981, where Sinatra was seeking to obtain a lucrative gambling license for his Las Vegas interests. They were never proven, but the whispers of Sinatra's intimate links to the mob were never silenced either. Was he really part of the Mafia? Or was he, as many have concluded, just a 'groupie', in love with the life but content to watch from the sidelines?

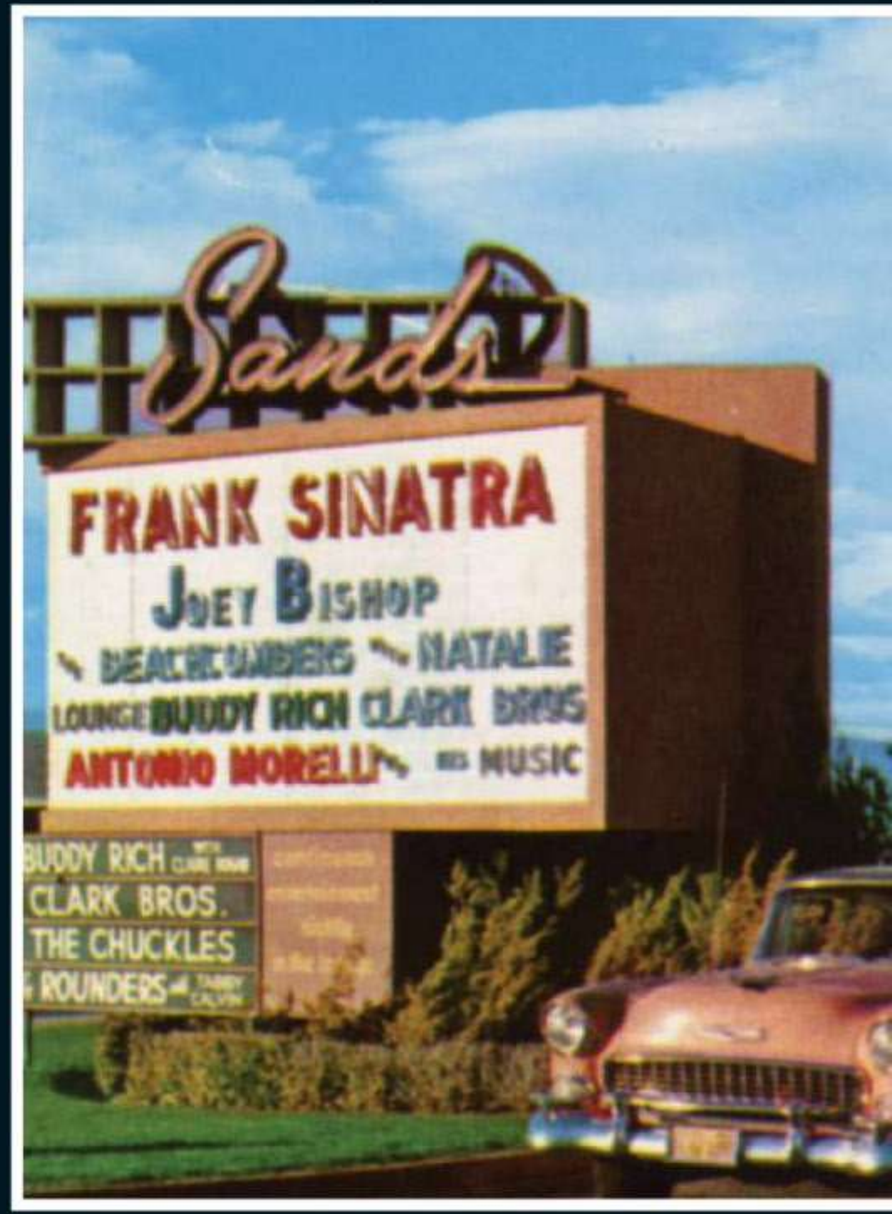
Possible Mafia ties stretch back to Sinatra's grandfather's youth in Sicily, the Italian island that was the birthplace of the Cosa Nostra. Frank's grandfather, Francesco Sinatra, was born

in 1857 in the hill town of Lercara Friddi: Mafia heartland only about 25 kilometres (15 miles) from the famous town of Corleone. While there's no evidence that Francesco was involved in any dubious undertakings, he lived on the same street as the Luciano family, whose most famous son Salvatore - nicknamed Lucky - would come to be considered one of the fathers of organised crime in New York in years to come. Lucky's address book even contained the name of one of Francesco's in-laws, so it's entirely possible that Francesco and the Lucianos were personally acquainted.

Francesco Sinatra emigrated to New York in 1900 with his wife and five children. The young Antonino, Frank's father, became an apprentice shoemaker, but also worked as a chauffeur and a professional bantamweight boxer. He had run-ins with the law involving a hit-and-run accident - for which he narrowly escaped a manslaughter conviction - and for receiving stolen goods. He married Frank's mother Dolly in 1913, and Frank himself was born, an only child, two years later.

Dolly was a midwife, known to some as Hatpin Dolly due to her notoriety for performing illegal backstreet abortions, for which she was convicted twice. But she was also heavily involved in local Hoboken and Jersey City politics, working for two successive mayors at a time when the boroughs were infamous for corruption. When she and Antonino opened a bar in 1917, she became well known for bouncing drunks on the streets with her ever-present billy club.

The bar was the environment in which the young Frank Sinatra grew up, at a time when selling alcohol was illegal thanks to USA's Prohibition laws and, specifically, the Volstead Act. Frank would be doing his homework in the evenings in the corner of an establishment that could only remain in business thanks to his father's bootlegging activities with the local gangster Waxey Gordon, who in turn was connected to Lucky Luciano. Hoboken, as a port town, was a major transit point for illicit alcohol shipments and Frank's uncles, Dolly's



"The bar was the environment in which the young Frank Sinatra grew up, at a time when selling alcohol was illegal"

SINATRA'S RAP SHEET

Crime: Street fights
Sinatra was a skinny child known for his singing and his closeness to his mother, but he claimed in later life that he saw plenty of delinquent juvenile action. His teeth, he said, were straightened not by a dentist but in a punch-up, and the scar above his nose was from a Coke bottle smashed in his face.

Verdict? Sinatra fed the experiences into his personal mythology: a tough kid who grew up on the mean streets.

Crime: Bootlegging
The Sinatras ran a bar during Prohibition, so naturally there was plenty of illegal activity keeping them in business. Frank grew up among gangsters and bootleggers. It's hard to imagine that Frank, right in the middle of it all, didn't help out his father and uncles with liquor runs on at least some occasions.

Verdict? His family had run-ins with the law, but Frank was never implicated and the bar business remained a roaring success.

Crime: Adultery
In 1938, before Sinatra became famous, he was caught in a compromising position with a married woman - never publicly identified - in north New Jersey. This might not seem very surprising given his reputation as a womaniser, but back then adultery was illegal, so it was a serious business.

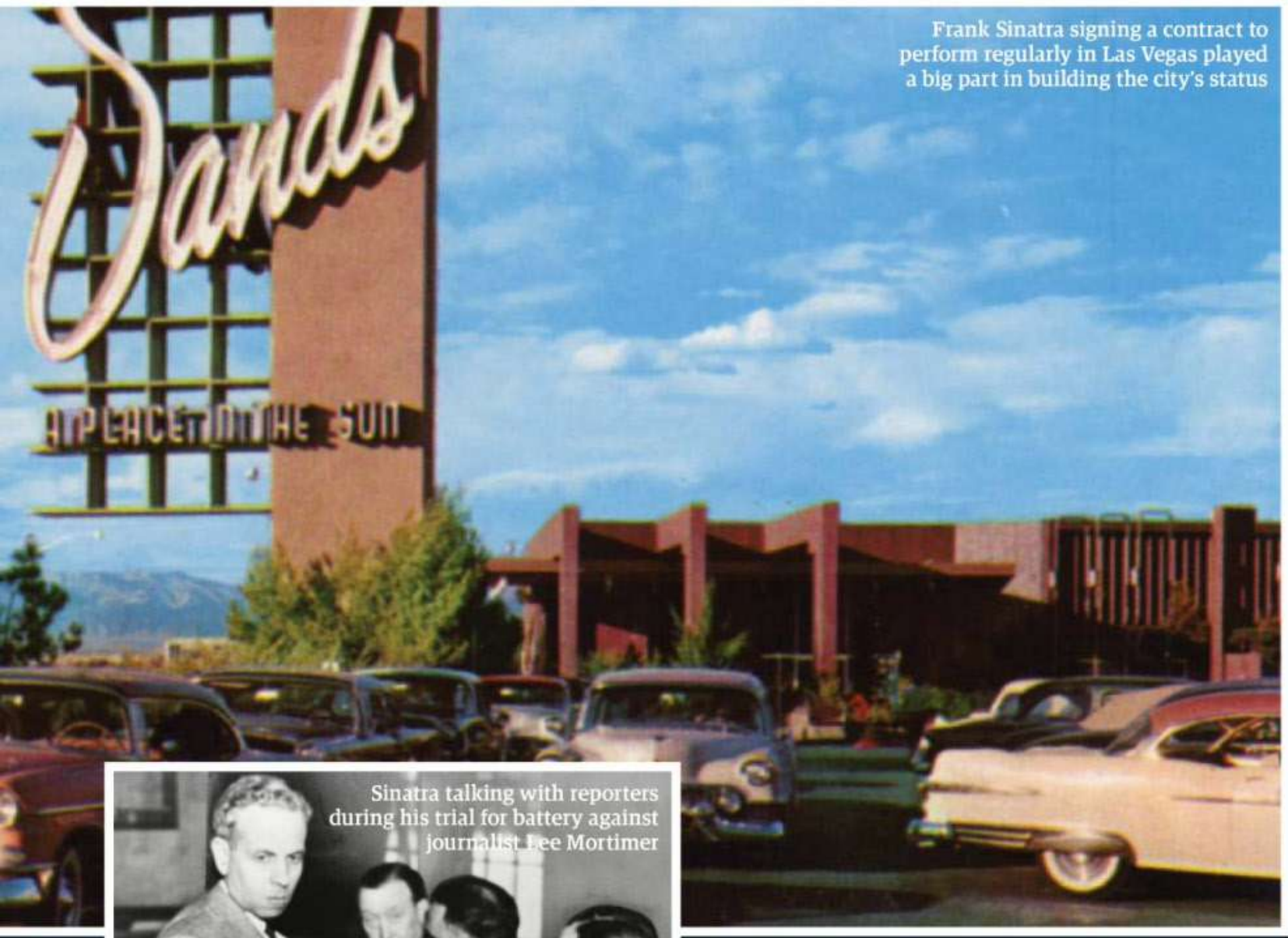
Verdict? He escaped a $500 fine when the charges were dropped, but still had to pose for a mugshot.

Crime: Dodging the draft
Sinatra avoided having to join the US armed forces during the Second World War, and a persistent rumour suggested that he'd paid a $40,000 bribe to doctors in New Jersey to be declared unfit for service. While his peers went and fought for the Allies in Europe and Asia, he remained at home living the decadent high life of a superstar.

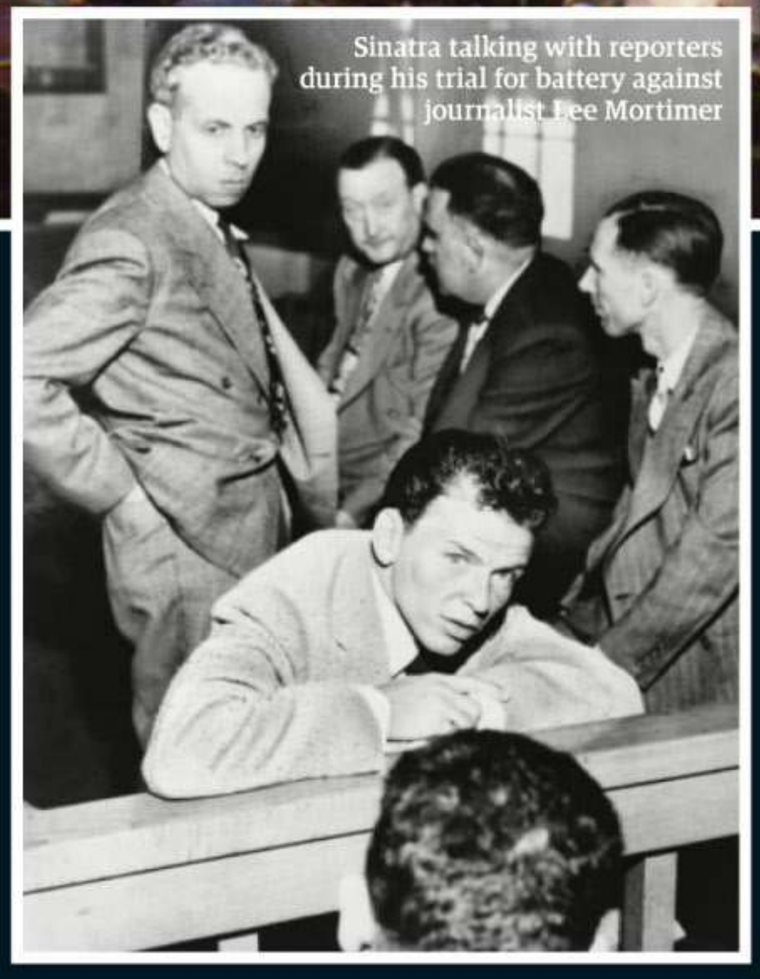
Verdict? FBI files released in 1998 revealed that Sinatra had been legitimately rejected due to a perforated eardrum and 'mental instability', but the myth still prevails among some.

Crime: Assault
In 1947, while having dinner at Ciro's in Los Angeles, Sinatra allegedly punched newspaper columnist Lee Mortimer. It was reported at the time that, as Sinatra walked past his table, Mortimer made a reference to his Italian ancestry and his links with the Mafia, receiving a punch on the jaw for his troubles.

Verdict? Sinatra had to go to court where he pleaded not guilty and was released on bail. The charges were dropped before the trial when, it was reported, Sinatra paid $9,000 to settle. Rumours of him using his fists to end disputes followed him throughout his career.



Frank Sinatra signing a contract to perform regularly in Las Vegas played a big part in building the city's status



Sinatra talking with reporters during his trial for battery against journalist Lee Mortimer

brothers, were also heavily embroiled in the trade. Prohibition, perversely, was big business if you were on the wrong side of the law. It was the making of the Mafia in the United States. Frank's upbringing certainly wasn't wracked with hardship: his family rode out the Great Depression of the 1930s to the extent that Dolly bought him a brand-new car for his 15th birthday.

Despite his constant exposure to mob activities, Frank seized on a different 'racket' very early in life. He gave his first public performances singing along to the player piano in the Sinatra Bar and Grill, at the age of about eight. Misty-eyed tough guys would give him pocket money for his renditions of sentimental popular songs of the day, and a future star was born. His first professional break as a singer came in 1935 when he was 20, as a member of local singing group The Hoboken Four (they were a trio until Dolly leaned on them to let Frank join). This led to years of singing in clubs and bars in New York and around the country: an occupation in which fraternising with mobsters and their bosses would have been completely unavoidable. Organised crime went hand-in-hand with the bar business, and even after Prohibition ended, the mob remained silent partners in many businesses. They were also heavily involved in the music industry, controlling most of the jukeboxes nationwide, and therefore dictating what records would be successful.

"Saloons are not run by the Christian Brotherhood", Sinatra hedged in later life. "A lot of guys were around that had come out of Prohibition and ran pretty good saloons. I worked in places that were open. They paid. They came backstage. They said hello. They offered you a drink. If Saint Francis of Assisi was a singer and worked in saloons he'd have met the same guys. That doesn't make him part of something..."

Sinatra enjoyed a very good year in 1939 – he had a contract with bandleader Tommy Dorsey, a hot enough act for Sinatra's national profile to be hugely increased. In his first year with Dorsey, Sinatra recorded more than 40 songs and topped the charts for two solid months with *I'll Never Smile Again*. But Sinatra's relationship with Dorsey was a troubled one, and their parting in 1942 began the first public rumblings of Sinatra's possible Mafia connections.

With his profile on the increase, Sinatra was keen to go solo, but Dorsey refused to release him from a contract that still had years to run. This put Frank in a difficult position; he was being well-

President John F Kennedy at an event at Rice University

JFK: Sinatra's crush

John F Kennedy and Frank Sinatra first met at a Democratic Party rally in 1955. They immediately hit it off and became firm friends both on the golf course and in the hostelries of society nightlife, where Sinatra was known to occasionally set Kennedy up with some extra-marital female companionship.

Sinatra was even involved in Kennedy's run for the US presidency, and as always, the Mafia weren't far from the story. Kennedy's father Joseph was afraid to use his own Mafia links to help his son's campaign, so allegedly asked John's new best friend to be an intermediary. Sinatra was more than happy to oblige, so he helped to convince mob boss Sam Giancana to employ 'persuasive methods' to deliver Illinois and West Virginia to Kennedy's cause in the Democratic primaries before the election.

The plan paid off, but once JFK was president he soon began to distance himself from Sinatra, realising that it would be unwise for a president to risk mob scandal. The final straw for Sinatra was when Kennedy snubbed him at his Palm Springs home, opting to stay with Bing Crosby instead. The bitter Sinatra, who had invested in lavish decorations and a helipad specifically for the visit, was so upset that he went around his house smashing his treasured Kennedy souvenirs with an axe. A long-standing Democrat, Sinatra switched his allegiance to the Republicans in later years.

The Rat Pack

The name 'Rat Pack' was first given to a group of New York celebrities in the 1950s centred around Humphrey Bogart, later appended to the peer group around Frank Sinatra. The group never referred to themselves by that moniker, preferring the Summit or the Clan. They played together on stage and on film for years, usually crashing one another's gigs rather than performing as a formal group.

1 Frank Sinatra, singer/actor

Greatest hits: *My Way, Strangers in the Night, It was a Very Good Year, I've Got You Under My Skin, The Lady Is a Tramp, Fly Me To the Moon, New York New York*
Worst moment: Attempted suicide in 1951.
Did you know? He was replaced by Clint Eastwood in *Dirty Harry* after an injury forced him to pull out, and turned down Charles Bronson's role in *Death Wish*.

2 Dean Martin, singer/actor

Greatest hits: *Everybody Loves Somebody, Memories Are Made of This, That's Amore, You Belong To Me, Ain't That a Kick in the Head?*
Worst moment: Walking off the Together Again tour in 1988, leading to a late-life estrangement from Sinatra. Martin didn't like playing stadiums.
Did you know? Drunkenness was part of the reputation he cultivated, but the 'booze' he drank on stage was often nothing more than apple juice.

3 Sammy Davis Jr, singer/dancer/actor

Greatest hits: *What Kind of Fool Am I?, Candy Man, I've Gotta Be Me*
Worst moment: The car accident that injured him and cost him an eye in 1954.
Did you know? Davis was a significant financial supporter of the American Civil Rights movement, but suffered racist jokes and bullying from his Rat Pack colleagues.

4 Joey Bishop, actor/comedian

Greatest hits: *The Thin Man* (TV), *Easter Parade, Ocean's Eleven* (film)
Worst moment: His 1960s talk show *The Joey Bishop Show* lasted only two years, battered in the ratings by Johnny Carson's famous *Tonight Show*.
Did you know? Bishop was the last surviving member of the Rat Pack; he died in 2007.

5 Peter Lawford, actor/producer

Greatest hits: *The Thin Man* (TV), *Easter Parade, Ocean's Eleven* (film)
Worst moment: Falling out with Sinatra in 1963, as Sinatra believed he had failed to intercede using his family connections when Kennedy opted not to stay at Sinatra's house. Lawford never worked with the Rat Pack again.
Did you know? Lawford married Patricia Kennedy, making him John F Kennedy's brother-in-law.

paid but his career was not his own. If he broke his contract he would owe considerable chunks of his income to Dorsey for the next decade: a clause Sinatra naturally found unsavoury. Lawyers desperately searched in vain for any loopholes in the deal that would allow Sinatra to walk free, and it looked like Dorsey would keep his biggest star. However, he was quickly persuaded to change his mind. Sinatra always denied it, but Dorsey's version of the story was that he found himself visited by Willie Moretti and two sharp-suited henchmen. "Willie fingered a gun and told me he was glad to hear I was letting Frank out of our deal", Dorsey recalled. "I took the hint."

The young crooner made the most of his opportunity and the next few years saw 'Sinatramania' grip the US, as the singer recorded hit after hit, played to sell-out crowds, caused near-riots wherever he went, became a ubiquitous presence on television and launched a film career. There was also resentment, though, as with the advent of World War II, he somehow avoided military service. Rumours were rife that he had paid his way out of the war – although the FBI never found any evidence of this – while other sources suggest he was deemed unfit on psychological grounds and because of a perforated

"Misty-eyed tough guys would give him pocket money for his renditions of sentimental popular songs of the day"

eardrum. Whatever the reason, pictures of him at home, cigarette in one hand and drink in the other, surrounded by beautiful women and living the superstar lifestyle, did not endear him to those in uniform and their families.

However, that controversy was a drop in the ocean compared to the furore that erupted when Sinatra was photographed in Cuba in 1947 at a mob celebration for Lucky Luciano's release from jail. The incriminating pictures showed Sinatra with his arm around Luciano on a hotel balcony; with Luciano at a Havana nightclub; and with the Fischetti Brothers at the airport, disembarking a plane with a case in hand. Why would he have been carrying his own luggage? Comedian and movie star Jerry Lewis (the former partner of Rat Pack lieutenant Dean Martin) later alleged that Sinatra used to carry money for the mob. Sinatra claimed the case was full of art supplies, and that he couldn't have physically carried the $2 million he was accused of trafficking out of the US. Journalist Norman Mailer quickly established that considerably more than $2m fits easily in an attaché, debunking 'Old Blue Eyes' argument.

If there was doubt about what was in the case, Sinatra's presence at the mob shindig was inarguable. Sinatra was close to Joe Fiscetti, who was a talent agent for mob-owned clubs all over the US, and had agreed to the impromptu Havana trip while holidaying with his wife Nancy across the water in Miami. Once in Cuba, Sinatra claimed, he learned the embarrassing truth that he was ensconced at a Mafia convention, and reasoned it would be impolite – not to say dangerous – to make excuses and leave. He stayed and performed for the goodfellas, but several witnesses confirmed that he displayed little reserve in accepting the mob's hospitality, which included hotel-room orgies with 'planeloads' of call girls. It was as if Sinatra felt right at home, and many of his Havana acquaintances would remain with him during his later Las Vegas years.

Where the Mafia's tentacles reached

Showbiz

With the money flowing through USA's show-business industry it was inevitable that the Mafia would be interested in owning a piece of it. In the first half of the 20th century their ownership of nightclubs in places like Las Vegas and New York meant practically every famous name in music at some point played in mob-owned establishments, and their control of most of the USA's jukeboxes meant they often dictated which records would be successful. They maintained a presence in Hollywood for some years too, extorting studios for protection. Some mobsters, like Johnny Roselli, even became producers.

Gambling

With gambling illegal in many states, the Mafia obviously owned a large stake in what was often a clandestine industry. Where it was legal, the Mafia still maintained a presence, not least in Las Vegas. The state of Nevada decriminalised gambling in 1931, effectively making it the gaming capital of the whole country. Gangsters such as Bugsy Siegel, Lucky Luciano and Meyer Lansky rushed to cash in, either building or owning large stakes in casinos like the Sahara, the Sands and the Flamingo.

Industry

One of the American Mafia's most lucrative schemes was its infiltration and eventual swallowing of the labour unions. For many years, union leaders were habitually threatened and paid off, meaning the Mafia could essentially control entire work forces, slowing down or stopping work if developers and contractors didn't toe their line. At their height, the Mafia could have completely halted construction and shipping under way in the US. This is why trade unions, which exist to protect workers' rights, are to this day regarded with such suspicion and hostility in the USA.

Politics

If the Mafia could control the law, they had an easier time getting on with their business. Payoffs and threats achieved results within the US (and Italian) political systems as they did in all other areas of society. In fact the mob have even occasionally involved themselves in presidential elections. Gangster Sam Giancana is thought to have played a large part in delivering significant seats in West Virginia during the Democratic campaign for eventual president John F Kennedy.

Sinatra's wise guy friends

Willie Moretti was the underboss of the Genovese crime family, and cousin of its boss Frank Costello. He was Sinatra's godfather (in the christening sense) and helped the young Frank to get out of his restrictive early contract with bandleader Tommy Dorsey.

Joe Fischetti (or 'Joe Fish') was a long-standing friend, chaperone and bodyguard of Sinatra's. Joe and his brothers Rocco and Charles, with whom Sinatra was also well acquainted, were mobsters with the Chicago Outfit, and cousins to the legendary gangster Al Capone.

Lucky Luciano was the first official boss of the Genovese family, and unofficially the godfather of the entire New York Mafia, responsible for splitting New York into the famous Five Families. Sinatra was photographed at Luciano's prison-release party in Cuba in 1947.

Johnny Roselli ('Handsome Johnny') was a gangster for the Chicago mob. He became particularly active in Hollywood where he ran extortion rackets and gambling operations. He strong-armed Columbia Studios head Harry Cohn into giving Sinatra his Oscar-winning role in *From Here To Eternity*, and was even a Hollywood film producer himself for a time!

Carlo Gambino was the boss of the incredibly successful Gambino family. Along with Luciano, he was instrumental in setting up the Five Families, and particularly in replacing the "boss of bosses" with a more democratic "Commission" of the five family heads. Sinatra was photographed with his arm around him after a concert in 1976.

Mob boss Carlo Gambino after his arrest in 1970

Sinatra (second from left) posing with a group of reputed mobsters

"When Mafia fortunes were being invested in making Las Vegas the gambling capital of the world, Sinatra was an important pawn in their game"

Before the glittering lights of Vegas and the Rat Pack years, though, came the doldrums, as Sinatra's star began to wane in the US, outshone by younger up-and-comers like teen heartthrob Eddie Fisher. Sinatra, now in his thirties, failed to launch the successful television career he'd hoped for, and actually attempted suicide in 1951. But he achieved one of the greatest comebacks of all time when he landed a role in the 1953 movie *From Here To Eternity*, for which he won an Oscar for Best Supporting Actor for playing Angelo Maggio, a down on his luck Italo-American GI. Once again, evidence suggests he didn't achieve that success entirely on merit. The head of Columbia Studios, Harry Cohn, had been adamant that Sinatra would not be cast in the film, until a phone call from gangster Johnny Roselli persuaded him it was in his best interests after all. The alleged episode was the inspiration for Mario Puzo in his novel *The Godfather*, for the part in which studio head Jack Woltz is terrorised into casting Johnny Fontane in his movie by a horse's head being left in his bed – Roselli's display of power was less overt but, it is alleged, just as impactful.

Having helped Sinatra revive his career, it was unlikely that the mob would let him out of their clutches. FBI director J Edgar Hoover famously described Sinatra as having a "hoodlum complex", and it's clear that he relished the dark glamour of associating with gangsters and criminals. The reality though was that he was as much in thrall to the Mafia as he would have been to Tommy Dorsey if he'd failed to break his contract all those years ago. When they asked him for free performances in support of one of their causes he would jump to oblige, and in 1953 when Mafia fortunes were being invested in making Las Vegas the gambling capital of the world, Sinatra was an important pawn in their game. If Vegas was to attract visitors, it needed a roster of star attractions and performers. Sinatra was to be a regular fixture at the mob-run Sands Hotel and Casino, in return for a two per cent stake in the operation. This was big business.

The Sands became his home away from home until the late-1960s, and in the mid-1970s another incriminating photograph would haunt him through the media: he was snapped backstage at the mob-built Westchester Premier Theatre in New York, with his arm around crime boss Carlo Gambino. The FBI kept a file open on Sinatra for five decades until his death in 1998.

Sinatra dressed like a gangster, talked like a gangster, behaved like a gangster, grew up around gangsters and fraternised with gangsters. Perhaps the greatest irony is that he was never actually a made man. His relationship with the mob was clearly beneficial to both sides: Sinatra got fame and fortune and the mob had a tame star who could be used to boost their coffers and shore up their investments when necessary. If Sinatra was instrumental in establishing Las Vegas, Las Vegas was equally important in his 1950s comeback, but while the singer was clearly starstruck by the mob, it's unclear whether the mob was similarly dazzled, or simply saw Sinatra as expedient as long as he behaved. "I'd rather be a don for the Mafia than president of the United States," is a quote often attributed to the singer. If that's true, it seems that he never really got His Way after all.